No. 276 / FEBRUARY 1996

THE NI
NEW INTERNATIONALIST

Brave new world

Brave New World also features in ***The Big Issue*** magazine thanks to its vendors and to the generous help of the ***Co-operative Bank.***

Housing and homelessness

MONTHLY
THE PEOPLE, THE IDEAS, THE ACTION IN THE FIGHT FOR WORLD DEVELOPMENT

COMING NEXT **MONTH**

Patriot Games

DAVID RANSOM

Why are people prepared to die for the sake of their country? And why are so many groups today demanding a nation of their own? The **NI** examines the rise of nationalism and the demise of the nation-state and looks at the shape of our changing world.

- **Sacred cows and sacred hills** Thoughts on the road to Sinya – and the borders Africa doesn't need.
- **Flags and balls** The psychology of nationalism – from sport to war.
- **As a woman I have no country** Women's relationship with national identity has always been an uneasy one. An examination of how 'Mother India' treats her female subjects.
- **Spitting in the soup** The separatists only just lost last year's referendum in Quebec. But how viable would Quebec be if they won next time?
- **The goat and the snake** How the Serbs, Croats and Muslims of Tuzla in Bosnia are taking a stand against Serb nationalism.
- **Ruslan's land** Chechens and Russians have battled since time immemorial. What spirit informs their different nationalisms today?
- **Return of a Native** A tirade from an Angry Scot.
- **Jigsaw culture** Half-Spanish, half-Italian with a hankering for British culture, Argentinian national identity doesn't quite know where to place itself.

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The monthly **New Internationalist (NI)** magazine was founded by Peter and Lesley Adamson in 1970. Together with a range of other publications it is published by New Internationalist Publications Ltd, which is wholly owned by the New Internationalist Trust and co-operatively managed by:
Accounts: Damian Bourke.
Administration: Alison Ware.
Design: Alan Hughes, Andrew Kokotka, Ian Nixon, Clive Offley.
Editorial: Vanessa Baird, Chris Brazier, Nikki van der Gaag, David Ransom.
Editorial (North America): Wayne Ellwood, Richard Swift.
Magazine circulation: James Rowland.
Magazine marketing: Michael York.
Production: Fran Harvey.
Publications editor: Troth Wells.
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THE NI NEW INTERNATIONALIST

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SUBSCRIPTION OFFICES AND ANNUAL PRICES
UK: PO Box 79, Hertford, SG14 1AQ Tel: (01992) 822899 Fax: (0171) 830 8585. *Individuals £24.85 p.a.; £6.85 qtly. Institutions £50. Student/Unwaged £14.70 (please telephone for further information).*
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Rest of the World: PO Box 79, Hertford, SG14 1AQ UK. Tel: (01992) 822899. *Individuals £29.85; Institutions £55.* Please pay in sterling by UK Cheque, Eurocheque, Visa, Mastercard or UK Banker's Draft. Despatch by air only.

Editorial and advertising offices

UK Editorial: 55 Rectory Road, Oxford OX4 1BW. Tel: (01865) 728181. Fax: (01865) 793152. E-mail: newint@gn.apc.org **Advertising:** Tel: (01384) 373421. Fax: (01384) 441904.
Canada/US Editorial: 1011 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario M6H 1M1. Tel: (416) 588 6478. Fax: (416) 537 6435. E-mail: nican@web.apc.org **Advertising:** tel: (613) 826 1003 fax: (613) 826 1141
Australia: 7 Hutt Street, Adelaide, S.A. 5000. Tel: (08) 2321563.

Print and distribution

Origination: Graphic Facilities, London UK.
Printed on environmentally friendly paper by Cradley Print Ltd, Warley, West Midlands, UK.
UK news trade distributor: COMAG Specialist Division, Mercury Centre, Central Way, Feltham, Middlesex TW14 0RX. Tel: (0181) 844 1000. Fax: (0181) 751 2666.
North America. Publications Contract 101400. Postage Paid at Toronto. US 2nd class postage paid at Lewiston, NY. (USPS 329-770) US Post-master: send address changes to: New Internationalist, PO Box 1143, Lewiston, NY 14092.

Permissions and indexing

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Indexed in the Canadian Periodical Index, CPI CD-ROM, CPI Online, the Canadian Magazine Index, CBCA OnDisc and the Alternative Press Index.

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NEW FOR 1996

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Carfax Publishing Company
P O Box 25 • Abingdon • Oxfordshire OX14 3UE • UK
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MAGAZINE DESIGNED BY **ANDREW KOKOTKA**
FRONT COVER PHOTOGRAPH OF A SHACK BEING BUILT ON SMOKEY MOUNTAIN, THE NOTORIOUS GARBAGE TIP THAT IS CONSTANTLY ALIGHT IN MANILA, THE PHILIPPINES, **PANOS PICTURES**

THIS MONTH'S **THEME**

Homelessness

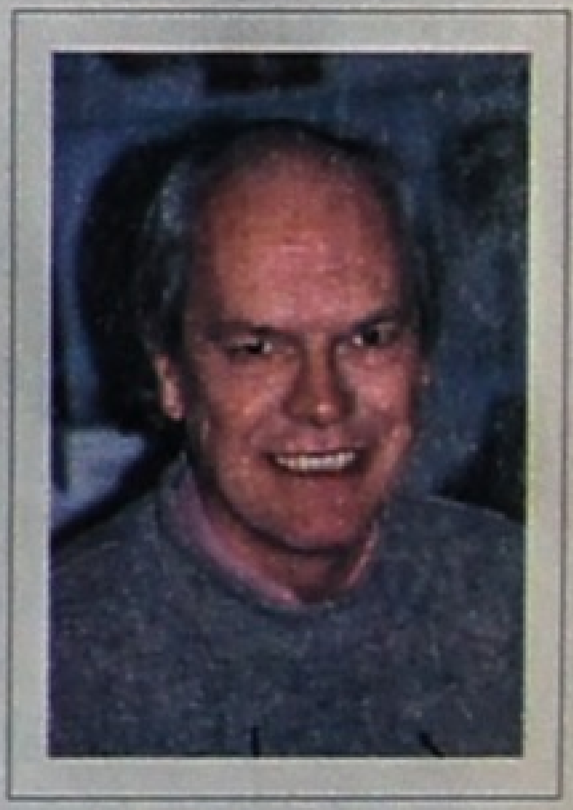
FROM THIS MONTH'S **EDITORS**

THERE is a fresh spirit of international solidarity abroad, and it's rising from the grassroots.

The street-paper movement, one of the brightest new publishing ventures in recent years, has had an international perspective from its inception, trading ideas and inspiration across national boundaries and oceans with astonishing ease. Even small activist organizations are bridging the gap between continents: two groups mentioned in this magazine – The People's Dialogue on Land and Shelter in South Africa and SPARC in Bombay – have worked closely together at a local level for several years. Their international exchanges have not been of abstract resolutions in cosy conference centres, but of immediate practical value. We can only hope that the UN 'City Summit' which takes place in Istanbul in June will be half as useful.

The slum dwellers of Cape Town and Bombay have little difficulty in making the best use of each other's hard-won experience. This kind of response to the much-vaunted globalization of the world's power structures has been a long time in coming. It is ironic – though instructive – that those who are usually thought of as the clearest losers, the third of the world's people without decent homes, are now leading the way.

So it is only fitting that the **NI** and ***The Big Issue***, Europe's leading street paper, have formed an alliance to produce this magazine on homelessness around the world (you can find out more about the international street-paper movement from the article on page 28).



A great many writers, photographers and activists have contributed to this magazine for little or no material reward, but we owe an exceptional debt of gratitude to Diana Mitlin and David Satterthwaite at the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), for giving us access to their fund of knowledge and for their patient help and advice.

Co-operation can, in theory, produce more than the sum of its parts – what big business likes to call 'synergy'. What big business aims for, however, is a synergy of greed; what we're after here is a synergy of solidarity.

There is an urgent need for this. It is clear to us that, contrary to what the dominant channels of communication usually suggest, there is a sickness of human destitution spreading through the world. The only known antidote is the determination of its intended victims, in alliance with everyone of good will, to resist and work for something better.

We would like to think that the alliance between the **NI** and ***The Big Issue*** marks the beginning of a grand international alliance against homelessness and the conditions that produce it. This may sound more like a grand dream than a grand alliance, but greater things have come from weaker vessels. The power of an international voice that fights for the interests of homeless people could be a power to be reckoned with.

A. John Bird
Editor-in-chief
The Big Issue

David Ransom

David Ransom
*for the **New Internationalist** Co-operative*

Letters

The New Internationalist welcomes your letters. But please keep them short. They may be edited for purposes of space or clarity. Include a home telephone number if possible and send your letters to the nearest editorial office. The address and e-mail are inside the front cover.

China bias

I was amused by the efforts of the editorial team (*Tibet* **NI 274**) to portray the cruel feudal past of Tibet that ended with the abortive uprising of March 1959 as a benevolent rule under which everyone was cared for. The uprising failed because it served the interests of the landlords with whom the Dalai Lama threw in his lot.

THE
NI
NEW INTERNATIONALIST
Special interview with the DALAI LAMA
Tibet
A cause for courage

Tibet was under Chinese sovereignty for many years. Comments on living standards in Tibet will only be honest if they take into account the conditions in Tibet in 1950 compared with the rest of China. The map of greater Tibet, to which the **NI** subscribes, includes large populations of other national minorities of China. In short, the sources of information that the **NI** has used are clearly biased against China and conditioned by the views of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan separatists. The apparent fascination with the mystical images of Tibet and the romantic projection of that onto the Dalai Lama ignores the shrewd politician who has been rewarded with the Nobel Prize for playing politics the way the masters of the world like him to.

SJ Indian
London, England

The benefits of reading

I was really angry with Roger Sharland's letter in your issue on *Rivers* (**NI 273**). He thinks you are being conventional in attaching importance to 'school skills' like reading and writing. If this means of communication is unimportant, why is he an **NI** reader? No-one in their right mind can deny that reading is a powerful tool to broaden one's horizons.

I don't care where and how reading skills are acquired – I am not a particular fan of our school system. But for most poor people – especially women – in Third World countries, it is either at school or not at all. If a woman can't read a newspaper, road signs or the destination on a bus, she is wholly dependent on others and she'll feel safer staying at home and more likely to stick to the traditions in which she was 'educated'. Tradition may involve many good things, but also many which for most of us are unacceptable: religious intolerance, the caste system, gender inequality, domestic violence, female genital mutilation, ritual torture and killing of animals, to name but a few.

I can't believe I'm doing this – having to prove the benefits of reading!

Irene Maradei
Athens, Greece

School vs education

I would like to thank Roger Sharland for his letter on 'education' vs 'schooling' (*Letters* **NI 273**). The use of 'education' when Northern-type 'schooling' is meant is one of the verbal sleights of hand that underpin cultural imperialism. It denigrates the majority of the world's population who may be highly educated but not schooled.

In Africa, most children who are schooled are at a disadvantage in life because they have never been educated in the skills they need to prosper in the village where they live. They have, moreover, been alienated from their parents and inculcated with foreign ideas and longings, both of which make them unhappy in their environment.

The importance schooling is given in Northern solutions to African problems keeps African countries dependent on Northern expertise and products. It requires them to seek the means to sustain them at the expense of the needs of their educated but unschooled majority.

NI could take a giant step forward in their struggle against cultural bias by refusing to misuse the word 'education' in the normal way.

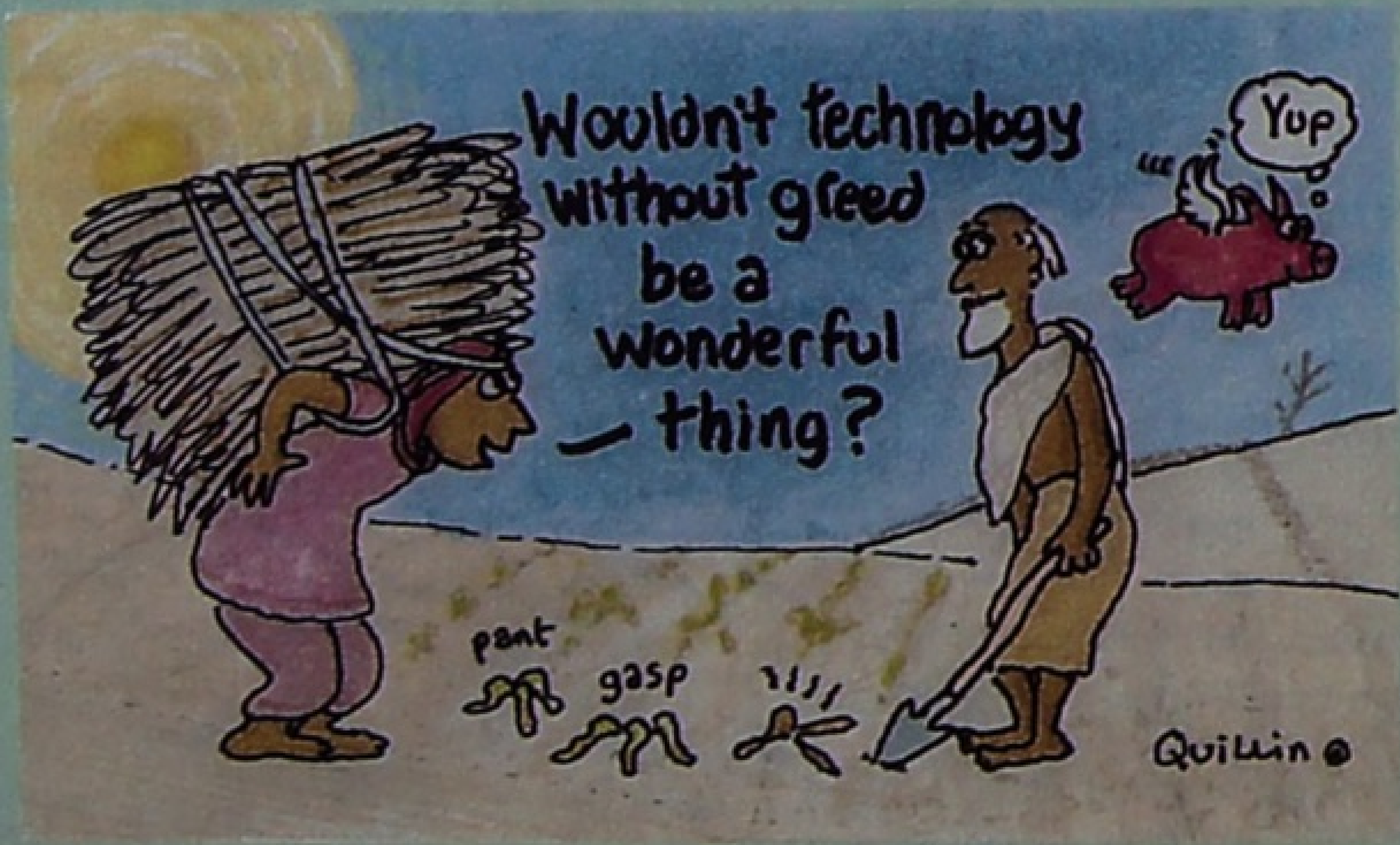
Mtumiki Njira
Limbe, Malawi

Wrong tree

After reading your issue on ***Rivers*** (**NI 273**), I cannot help thinking that the anti-dam lobby are barking up the wrong tree if they believe that through their actions they are trying to help the great majority of the Third World. Clearly the Third World needs more – not less – engineering. The building of dams needs trained engineers and other skilled workers. Dams do not merely generate power, but also a demand for trained workers and training institutions. As in nineteenth-century Britain, Third World countries would 'take off' naturally after an 'industrial revolution' brought about by technology and manufacturing industry.

Perhaps environmentalists should rethink their actions.

Edward Good
London, England


Wouldn't technology without greed be a wonderful – thing?
Yup
pant
gasp
Quillin ©

VIV QUILLIN

Family names first

In your review of *Sister Drum* (*Reviews* **NI 273**), the Chinese composer for the album, He Xutian, was referred to by his given name, Xutian, whereas people of European origin mentioned in other reviews were referred to by their family names.

This appears to be an error arising from your ignorance of the fact that the Chinese – like most East Asians – place their family names before their given names (except in cases where they have taken on Christian/Western names). I had expected better of a magazine that is in most other ways sensitive to and aware of cultural differences.

Lim Ai Leng (A L Lim)
Exeter, Australia

Social metaphor

Your approach to the subject of ***Coffee*** (**NI 271**) showed just how commodities enjoyed by the industrialized West are the burden of the 'under-developed' world.

We have long thought that coffee was an important social metaphor. As one of the main plantation crops, it enslaved a good part of the world. Yet it also became the drink that fuelled revolutionary discourse in cafés from the eighteenth century to the present. The café system which coffee engendered, along with sugar (for coffee was never truly accepted as a mass commodity until its bitter taste could be moderated) became a vortex of the Enlightenment. Unlike beer and gin, coffee focused the mind and stimulated the intellect.

This paradox, and the fact that major capitalist enterprises – Lloyds, the Dutch and British stock exchanges etc – have an extraordinary historical link with coffee, make it an extremely important commodity to discuss.

Bob Biderman
Cambridge, England

Global government

Why, nationally, is power checked and balanced by democracy while globally we prefer a balance of terror? Deterrence has prevented direct war between the most heavily armed nations and pushed proxy war onto impoverished people. The premise on which the philosophy of deterrence is based – a world divided – would not be true if the nations with the deterrent relinquished control of the UN Security Council in favour of a gender/race/creed/nationality balanced directorate mandated by global ballot.

The democratic election of a world government would be a first step in doing justice to the people of the Majority World who presently have no say in the institutions that run their lives. Power-sharing would create a common defence policy resulting in the subsuming of militaries under unitary command.

Democracy offers the chance of a safe world. Nuclear standoff, by definition, never can.

Is it really that difficult to organize an election?

Kev Coffey
Leeds, England

Women's cloth

I have just learned of a woven cloth which was draped from the Great Wall during the Women's Conference in China. It is now going to be lengthened to stretch across villages or along roadways to major conference centres elsewhere.

This seems to me a really positive contribution, started by Cambodian women. I hope the **NI** will give it the high profile it deserves as it should go down in history as the most meaningful message of solidarity from any women's group in the world. It has endless possibilities for its powerful message from women of all cultures.

Bridget Mahoney
Hurstville Grove, New South Wales, Australia

The views expressed on the letters page are not necessarily those of the New Internationalist.

LETTER FROM **MOSCOW**

No such number

Olivia Ward writes from her sickbed after a collision in a Moscow street.

I'VE NEVER MET Sergei Grachev but I hold his fate in my hands. One word from me, and the 35-year-old delivery person will almost certainly end up in jail, his family thrown into destitution and his employment prospects shattered.

As I squirm painfully in my chair looking for a position that hurts less than this one, I would like to throw the book at Grachev. It was his reckless overtaking on an icy Moscow road that started a four-car collision which ended up breaking several of my bones and destroying my car. If it weren't for the Volvo's tank-like construction, police say, my life would have come to a full-stop.

I've seen people like Grachev on every trip I take through this country: men (and occasionally women) who view the bumper of the car in front of them as a bull views a red rag. Some are drunk, others blindly reckless in their compulsion to be first in line.

It's this streak of power madness and ruthless disregard for others that runs through so much of life in Russia, poisoning its future and keeping it anchored in the past. It is honestly come by, dating back centuries to the Tsars, Ivan the Terrible and the Tatar hordes.

I've experienced it on the battlefield in Chechnya, in the war-torn refugee villages, during the bloody siege of the Ostankino television network and the storming of the Russian White House. Thousands of people have died in these events, but for what?

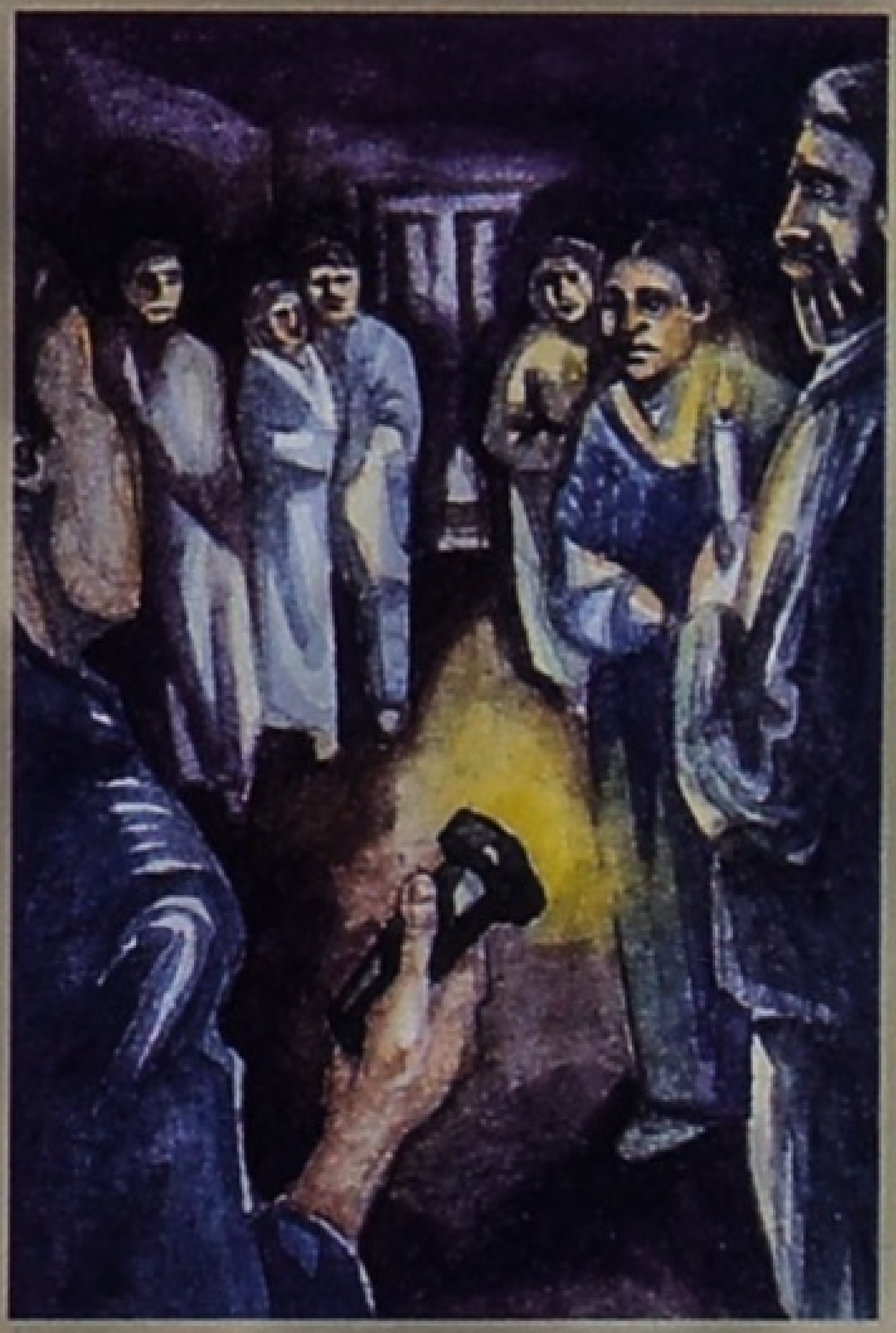
As I slumped in the wreckage of my car that snowy day, streams of ambulances passed by without stopping. Not even the prowling traffic police managed to pull them over, bent as they were on taxi-ing paying passengers to their destinations.

If I had been more seriously injured I would have died there. What kind of penalty should corrupt ambulance workers face?

I was mulling over those bitter thoughts from my bed a few nights later, when all the power went out in my building. We had already been without heat or hot water for two icy days, as usual without any explanation. In Russia, the word *remont*, or repairs, is an explanation in itself, unyielding and unchallengeable.

Limping to the door I could smell a powerful odour like the simmering of toxic chemicals. A thin nauseating smoke was filtering through the outer corridor, which was now strangely warm. Neighbours gathered in their night attire like curious peasants on an old-fashioned canvas, torches and candles in hand.

A friend who had groped his way to the supervisor's suite brought us the news. 'The repairer turned off the water-cooling system two days ago for the *remont* and forgot to turn it back on,' he said incredulously. 'That's what keeps the wires from overheating and burning the building down. They were already smouldering.'



MIRIAM McCURDY

The habitually drunken supervisor had vanished. But a cheerful, elderly electrician told tenants that he was restoring the cooling system and would give us a bonus for our pains – the heat and hot water that the repairer also forgot to switch back on.

After three years in this country I have come to expect anything. I have comforted friends who fled burning buildings in the middle of the night, were abducted and kidnapped, blackmailed, beaten or deprived of relatives by murder or senseless accidents.

I have tried to calm them, and myself, with the hope that things were beginning to change and a new era of civilization would emerge. Now my resources were exhausted. The supervisor would pay! The repairer would pay! Sergei Grachev would pay to the fullest extent of the law.

Raving like a madwoman in a Jacobean drama, I was led back to my couch. No country, I was gently reminded, can develop a sense of responsibility in four years. The punitive approach would only convince the perpetrators that they were unjustly persecuted.

'You know,' said a friend later, 'our country is made up of people who suffer and who make others suffer. That's the way it has always been. Don't ask why.'

Calmer, but still shaky, I thought about it next day as the telephone rang. The image of Sergei Grachev was fading into the endless greys of the Russian landscape, neither better nor worse than the other shades that loomed there. Still, something stuck in my throat.

'It's Grachev. He wants to make some kind of arrangement with you to avoid prosecution.'

I picked up the receiver with white knuckles. 'Sorry. You have the wrong number.' ■

Olivia Ward is bureau chief for the *Toronto Star* in Moscow.

Update

CHILDREN AND WAR

UNICEF's *State of the World's Children 1996*

A ten-point agenda for children

THE latest report from UNICEF announces a ten-point, action-oriented anti-war agenda with concrete measures to reduce the impact of war on children.

'Wars are not going to disappear but we can at least mitigate their effects and ensure that they do not target children,' explains Carol Bellamy, the UNICEF Executive Director. 'To that end, this anti-war agenda sets out a series of steps that we believe to be both realistic and effective and that would dramatically improve the well-being of children in situations of conflict.'

In particular, the agenda includes a call for a universal ban on the production, stockpiling, sale, export and use of anti-personnel landmines and commits UNICEF to a boycott of any company involved in the manufacture or sale of landmines.

It also calls for a 'child impact assessment' prior to the application of any sanctions and breaks new ground by insisting that the concept of children as 'zones of peace' should be elevated to a tenet of international law. Children as zones of peace involved the establishment of geographical zones or time periods within which children can be protected from harm and provided with the essential services to ensure their survival and well-being in the midst of conflict.

The agenda also demands that increased investment be made in conflict prevention and in efforts towards reconciliation and rehabilitation. A cornerstone of rehabilitation must be the provision of psychosocial trauma programmes to help heal the emotional wounds of children affected by war. UNICEF also argues for special protection and support for women and girls because of the likelihood of sexual violence in wartime.

UNICEF estimates that during the last decade two million children have lost their lives, four and a half million have been disabled, one million have been orphaned or separated from their parents and some ten million have been psychologically traumatized.

The *State of the World's Children* argues above all that the welfare of children is inseparably linked to world peace. Poverty and lack of development fuel hatred and escalate hostilities.

'It was the suffering of children that prompted the founding of UNICEF 50 years ago,' says Carol Bellamy. 'It is the continued suffering of children that reminds us how much more we need to do.' ■

UNICEF

Cheesy treats

Dutch scientists have discovered why an African mosquito, *Anopheles gambiae*, which causes thousands of malarial deaths, finds humans so attractive. Researcher Bart Knols sat in his underwear inside a mosquito net allowing mosquitoes to bite him. Most headed straight for his smelly feet. When he washed his feet they were less keen on heading south but bit him on other parts of his body. The team then decided to bait a trap with air passed over some Limburger cheese (which has an odour resembling unwashed feet) and the mosquitoes went for it. The point of all this is to find a substance that mosquitoes will find irresistible and use it to trap them. A similar principle is already working to trap and kill tsetse flies.

New Scientist, Vol 148 No 2002

Chained women

British Jewish women who are chained to their ex-husbands by discriminatory religious divorce laws held a vigil outside the Chief Rabbi's office in London. Thousands of Jewish women find that even where a marriage has broken down irretrievably and a civil divorce has been granted, a significant number of ex-husbands refuse to grant a *get* or religious divorce. They may refuse the *get* to gain the upper hand in negotiations over money and property or out of vindictiveness. These ex-wives who are known as *agunot* (chained women) may not remarry in an Orthodox or United Synagogue. A civil remarriage is considered by religious authorities as adulterous and any subsequent children are deemed *mamzerim* (bastards) and are effectively outcasts from the community.

HAVE NOT NG TO LOSE BUT YOUR CHAINS

Protesting their chains: Jewish women demonstrating in London.

ELAINE KENNEDY

Two years ago the Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks, had announced his intention to introduce mandatory pre-nuptial contracts which would make it impossible for a husband to refuse a *get* once a civil divorce had been granted. So far it has not been implemented. Gloria Proops, who was at the vigil and who had to wait 20 years before being granted a *get*, says: 'I was deprived of the chance to remarry. This is an unjust law which allows vindictive or greedy men to deprive their ex-wives of another chance. If men suffered this agony, a solution would have been found long ago.'

Adrienne Baker

P O'DONNELL / CAMERA PRESS

Murderous words

'One less murderer!' screamed the headline of Jordanian newspaper *Al Sabeel* when Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated – the paper is allied to the main opposition party, the Islamic Action Party. No prizes for originality though. It seems they were merely echoing the words of Israel's current acting Premier, Shimon Peres, who said the same thing of the earlier killing of Islamic Jihad leader Dr Fathi Shkaki, presumably by Israeli agents. The headline angered King Hussein who warned the press: 'Do not destroy in the name of democracy', then promptly urged parliament to reconsider the press law with a view to greater governmental control.

Amy Henderson, Gemini News Service

A tomb too far

Predictions vary on when exactly the 'sarcophagus' that encases the highly radioactive core of the damaged Chernobyl reactor could fall apart. Some say this year, others give it up to six years. Solutions aren't forthcoming. A second double-layered concrete enclosure that would stand for a century has been suggested, but it would take a decade to build. And with a price-tag of $1.3 billion, Ukraine cannot afford it.

World Press Review, Vol 42 No 11

Lost in music

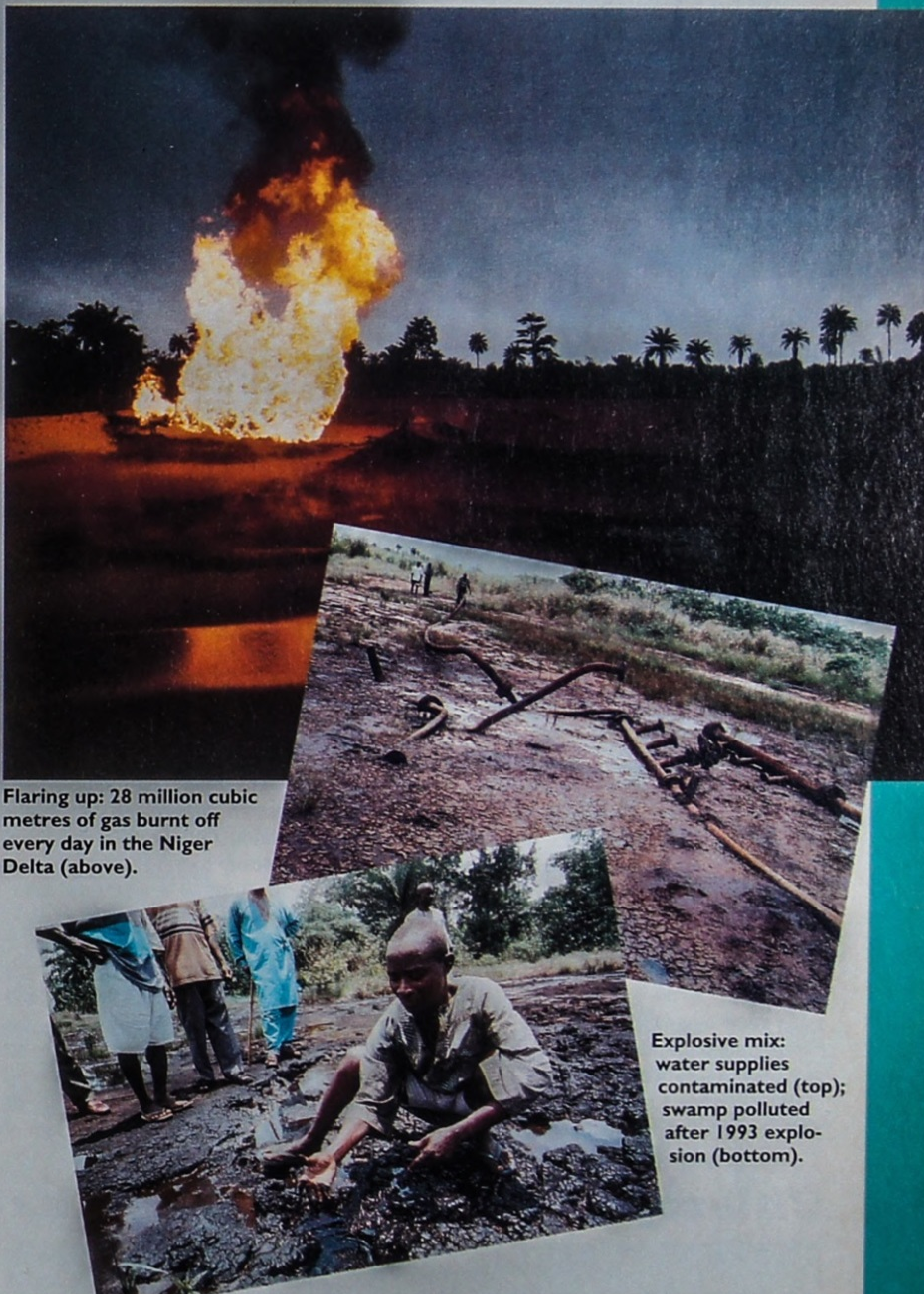
Lifvon Guo is a betel-nut grower from the Amis tribe of southern Taiwan. Through many of his 76 years he has sung traditional chants in his deep, resonant voice while working on his farm. One day a friend of his in Taipei called him up to tell him that his voice was on the radio and sure enough it was. His chants were the vocal line on Enigma's hit single 'Return to Innocence' which stayed for 32 weeks in Billboard magazine's Top 100 chart. The album sold more than five million copies. Yet Lifvon didn't even know his voice had been used. Enigma came by Lifvon's chants on a disc of recordings made without his knowledge when the ministries of Taiwan and France had invited him to perform in Europe in 1987 for the grand sum of $15 a day. Enigma paid the French cultural ministry $6,000 to use Lifvon's voice. Lifvon is now preparing to spar with EMI and Enigma for failing to acknowledge him. World beat music today uses aboriginal chants to a great extent, but the native singers have little legal authority over the use of their voices.

Far Eastern Economic Review, Vol 158 No 44

NIGERIA

Shell Oil Disaster

Secret photographs from Nigeria



DETLEF PYPKE / STILL PICTURES

Flaring up: 28 million cubic metres of gas burnt off every day in the Niger Delta (above).

Explosive mix: water supplies contaminated (top); swamp polluted after 1993 explosion (bottom).

THE photographs on this page were taken secretly by a German photographer in Ogoniland using a miniature Leica camera. They are the last photographs to be smuggled out of the area – a previous attempt by a Canadian photographer to do the same led to his being beaten up by Military Police and imprisoned for a week. He was only released because he was very ill, both from being beaten up and from conditions in the prison. Needless to say, he left Nigeria without film or cameras. ■

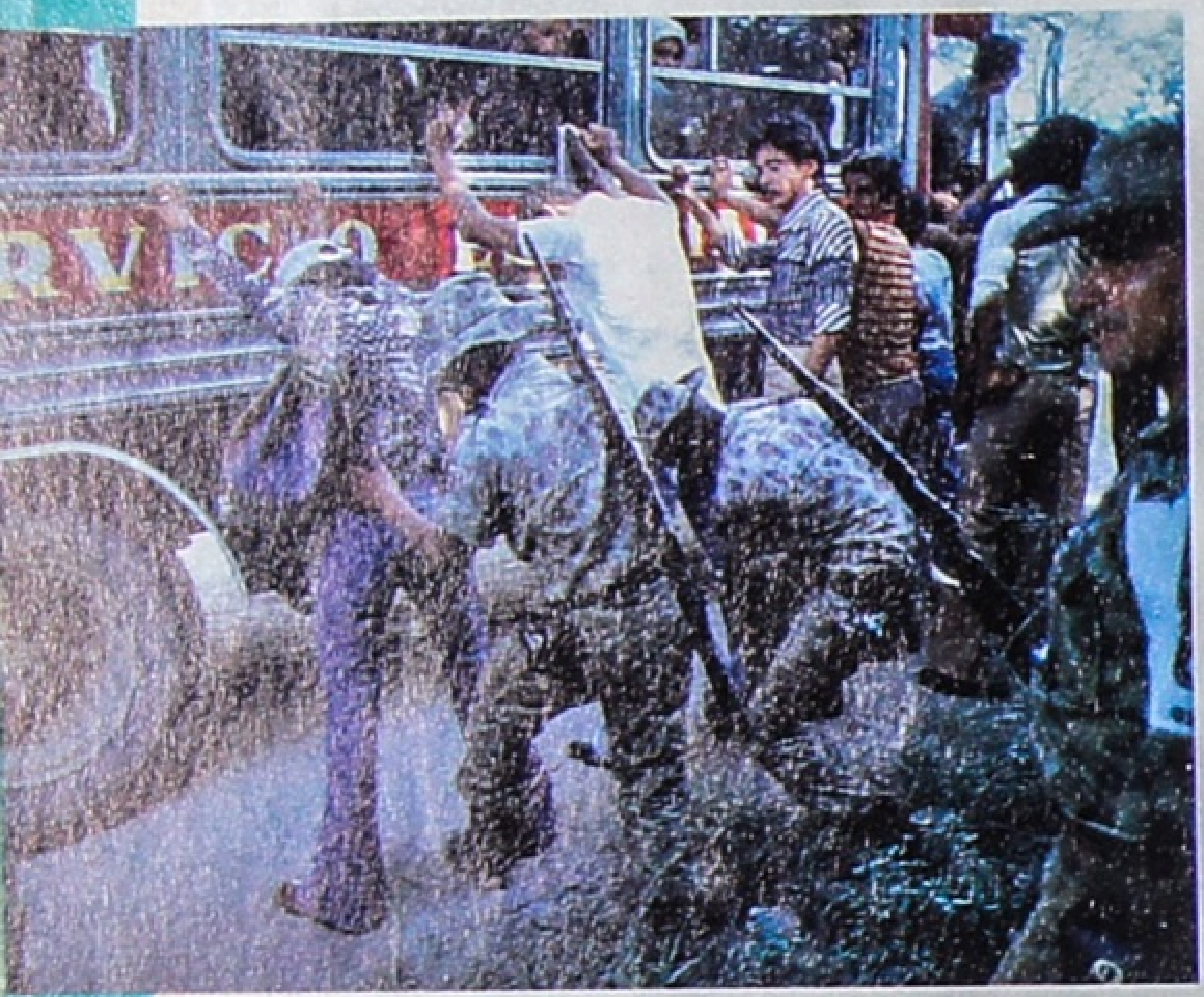
Update

CRIME

Medellín murderers

Armed youth gangs take the city

MOST of the killers and victims in the Colombian city of Medellín, 'murder capital of the world' are young men from the *barrios laderas*, the poor hillside neighbourhoods. Armed youth gangs are a legacy of cocaine's boom years and are major contributors to Medellín's incredible homicide rate, almost 5,000 murders a year.


J HAILLOT / L'EXPRESS / CAMERA PRESS

Drugs search – but for dealers the riches are worth the risk.

For 21-year-old Dario belonging to a gang offers steady work with good money. 'Everyone starts as a *chichipato* (greenhorn). You work your way up – robbing shopping chains in the centre, breaking into houses, and then you can buy your first gun. You get to know more people and in the end, if you want to make good money, you work as a *sicario* (hired killer). It's like working for a company, but you earn more money.'

Dario's gang's most lucrative work has been stealing cars to order and taking them to the coast. There they are handed over to corrupt police who pay for them in cash, guns and ammunition. Much of the arsenal available to the gang has been bought from police and demobilized guerrillas. It includes sawn-off shotguns, mini-Uzis, revolvers and pistols, and even Israeli-made Galil assault rifles, used by the Colombian Army.

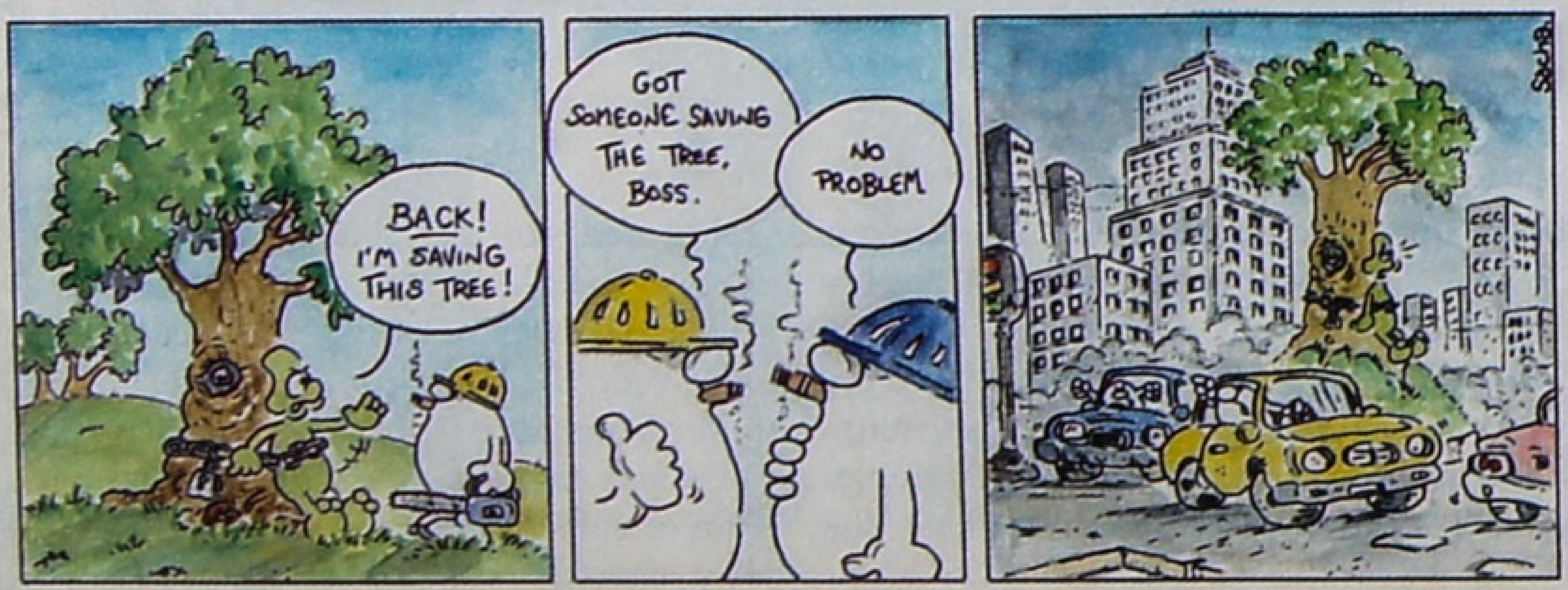
Of course the problem with Dario's line of work is the greatly increased likelihood of being killed. Victims are often rival gang members or others who cross into gang territory or suspected informers. 'You can't be on the corner, armed and with your *parceros* (mates) if you don't feel okay about it,' says Dario. 'But you're always worried whether someone is going to kill you, or if the police are going to get you. You make a lot of enemies in a gang, and almost always you can't get out of it. You die in it.'

A traditional Sunday activity for the gang (when the Atletico Nacional soccer team is not playing at home) is to visit the cemetery to smoke marijuana and chat to dead comrades.

Dario's reasons for staying in such a high-risk vocation is fuelled, as it is for many, by the desire to have a flash life as opposed to the limited rewards of more traditional forms of work in Colombia. 'If you work you get a few hundred pesos a month – you have nothing. And robbing... you hit someone and in a couple of hours you have cash, you have clothes, you have shoes. You get used to living with money, and it's such a drag to be young without money.' ■

Paul Smith, Gemini

Chlorophyll by Sacha


BACK! I'M SAVING THIS TREE!
GOT SOMEONE SAVING THE TREE, BOSS.
NO PROBLEM
Sacha

Innu imprisoned

Nine Innu Indians from Labrador, Newfoundland and one supporter from Toronto were sent to prison for 14 days at a cost of more than $50,000 to the Newfoundland Government because they refused to pay fines for protesting on their own land. The Innu protesters were convicted on charges arising from the occupation of Dutch F-18 fighters during a runway protest at Goose Bay on 8 September 1993. Their protest was against low-level flights by NATO air forces – over 8,000 a year – which threaten their best hunting grounds and make their lives a misery. Amongst those sentenced was the Innu Nation President Peter Penashue who said: 'This is not an issue of guilt or innocence, but one of justice; and justice is certainly not served when Innu people have to spend time in jail for defending their land and way of life.'

Survival International

SURVIVAL INTERNATIONAL

Locked in a conflict of arms – an Innu protestor and the military.

Diminished labour

Bangladesh's fertility rate has declined from 6.3 births per woman in the early 1970s to 3.4 births in 1993-94. And the decline is accelerating according to the Dhaka-based National Institute of Population and Training. Despite poverty and a low rate of literacy, family-planning programmes have made tremendous headway, defying all demographic theories. No doubt Bangladesh's 50,000 family-planning fieldworkers (more than half of whom are women) have contributed greatly towards making the idea of small families widely accepted.

Roushan Zaman, Gemini News Service

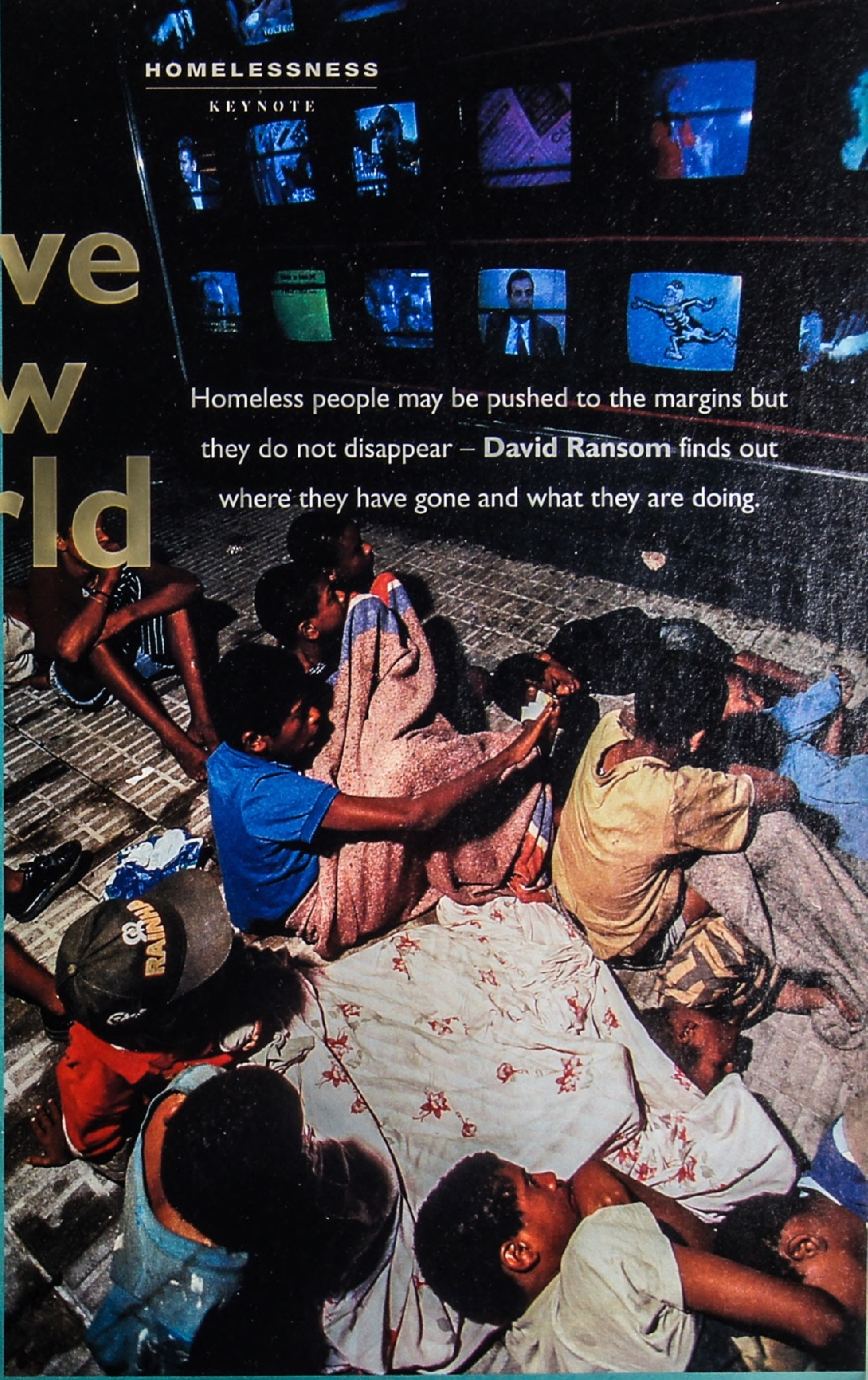
Quote

'Most of us have got some skeletons in our cupboard and we can't be too insistent about looking into other people's cupboards.'

Malaysian Prime Minister **Dr Mahathir Mohamed** to Commonwealth Heads of State.

Brave new world

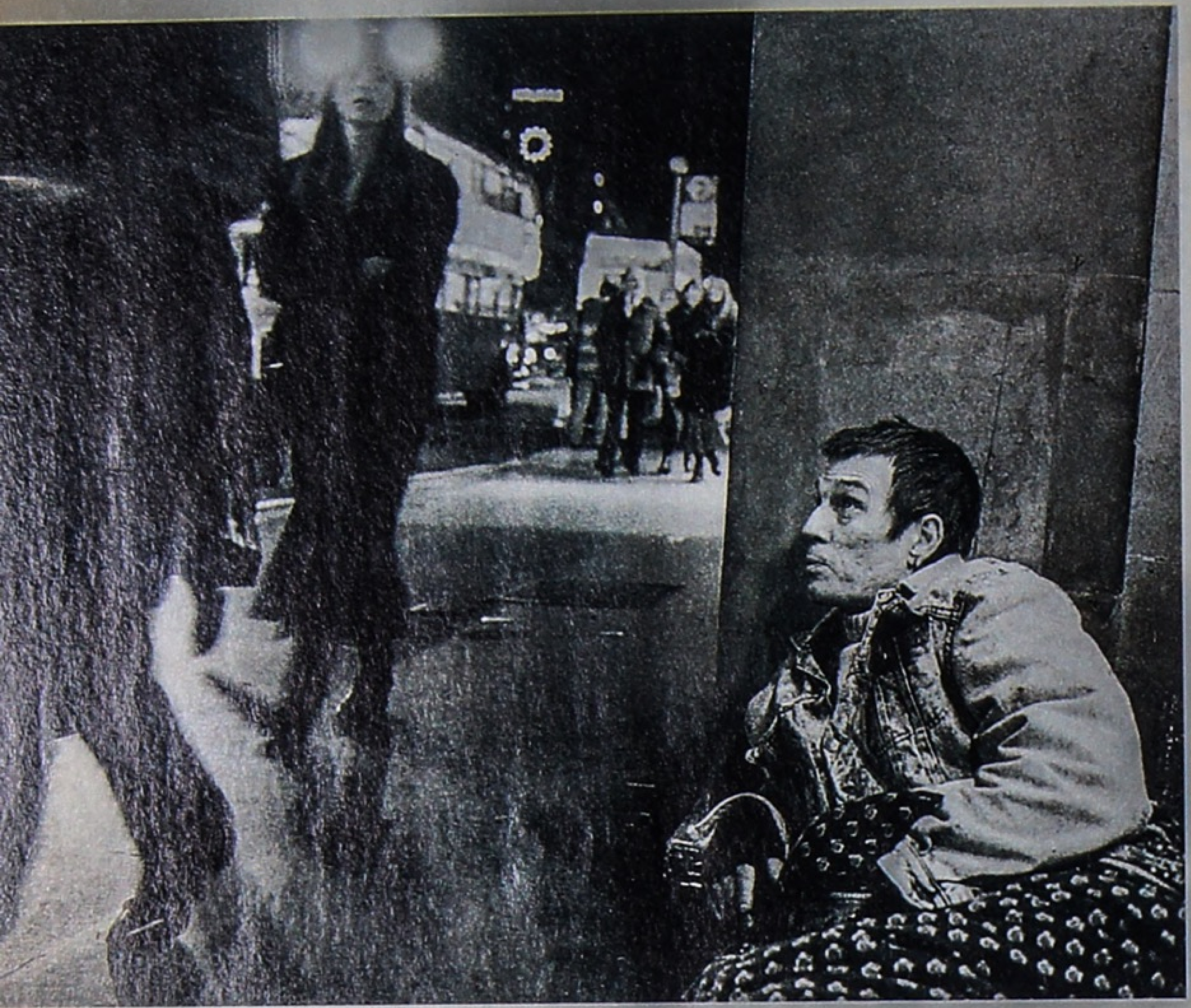
Homeless people may be pushed to the margins but they do not disappear – **David Ransom** finds out where they have gone and what they are doing.



JOHN MAIER / STILL PICTURES

'It is possible to live in economic poverty where there is love, but not in emotional poverty where there is no affection.' Bruce Harris is talking about the 5,000 or so street children who come every year to Casa Alianza, a project he works for in Guatemala City.[1]

The children's story really began long before they were born, 40 years ago, with a CIA-inspired military coup, followed by a genocidal civil war. As so often in Latin America, the issue at stake in Guatemala was land. The reforms proposed by President Arbenz would have given to the majority indigenous peoples at least some legal title to land they had farmed for centuries. After the coup they found it being distributed by the military to its



GIDEON MENDEL / NETWORK

Evading the issue on the streets of London (left); on the outside looking in – street kids in Brazil (previous page).

sympathizers. Displaced people, among them thousands of children, ended up in crude shacks around Guatemala City. Many of the children then fled the shacks to live on the city streets. They are still doing so now.

'Perhaps the most significant shortcoming of these children's "home" is not so much the physical infra-structure as the almost total lack of affection,' continues Harris. 'The children can find friends on the street who will care about them, though the material environment is not much different from the cardboard shack. They form surrogate families which society calls "gangs". The street becomes their home. In the material sense they are homeless but in an affective sense they have more of a home on the streets than they did in their shack... I guess what I am trying to say is that for the street children a "home" is more of a concept than a material space.'

The meaning of this concept is not hard to grasp. All children crave a sense of belonging and human warmth. To take it away from them by making their families homeless is the worst kind of abuse. Children do not 'become' homeless – they are made so. That there are millions of children around the world who have, in this fuller sense, been made homeless is nothing less than shameful.

It is no less shameful, however, that this should happen to anyone else. And, make no mistake, there is nowhere in the world, from St Petersburg to São Paulo, from Wellington to Washington, where this is not happening to someone. It can even happen at the centre of world attention, around the venues for the Olympic Games.

Scott Leckie, a lawyer working with the Habitat International Coalition, complains that 'only scant attention was paid to more than 720,000 low-income residents of Seoul who were forcibly removed from their homes in anticipation of the 1988 Olympic Games. Even less coverage has been given to the mass displacement now occurring in Atlanta, Georgia, as officials "spruce up" the city prior to the 1996 Olympic Games. Atlanta shows notorious contempt for the homeless. A growing number of the already large homeless population once lived on sites recently developed into Olympic venues. Local agencies claim that anywhere between 10,000 and 20,000 people have lost their homes thus far.'[2]

Children do not 'become' homeless – they are made so

This amounts to what might best be called 'the politics of exclusion'.[3] Put very crudely, such politics promotes a studied indifference to anyone without money. In the North they are in a minority, and so exclusion can be conducted in the name of democracy. It takes on changing guises, most of them economic; in the US it is 'deficit reduction', in Britain 'privatization', in Aotearoa/New Zealand 'Rogernomics'. In the South there's just one, universal and essentially meaningless form, and it's called 'structural adjustment'. The moneyless here are often in a majority and so more reliance must be placed on enforcement. But everywhere the aim is the same, to promote the 'realism' of global free-market economics and minimize democratic influence.

Anyone who lived through the economic chaos of the 1930s, when similar prejudices prevailed, must be watching this turn of events in utter disbelief. The destitution that was visited on millions of people in the North then has its parallel in the South now. What is usually referred to as 'housing' in the North has a particularly important part to play in maintaining these prejudices. As a commodity housing is the place where we 'invest' our lives in the workings of the market, the focus for most of our private dreams of satisfaction.

What has recently happened to housing – and therefore to the homeless – in Britain illustrates the folly of it all extremely well. From 1979 the Thatcher Government promoted what it liked to term a 'property-owning democracy' on the back of massive government subsidies. The result was feverish speculation, a scramble up the rungs of the 'property ladder'. House prices shot up. At one point home owners – in reality mere debtors to financial institutions – were spending more on credit raised against the notional increase in the money value of their homes than was being produced by the whole of British industry. Then, in 1989, the ladder slipped and fell away. Interest rates soared and house prices slumped. Some two million households found themselves stuck with houses worth less than they'd borrowed to pay for them: a predicament described without the slightest hint of irony as 'negative equity'. Thatcher's home-owning democracy vanished in the puff of negative equity it had always been.

The interests of the third of the British population who were unwilling or unable to climb the property ladder were simply ignored. None of the severe problems afflicting public – 'council' – housing were addressed, other than by selling it off, sometimes in gerrymandering operations designed to improve the local Tory Party vote. In 1994 just 441 new houses were built by local councils in Britain.[4]

The collapse of public housing was accompanied by a doubling in the number of families with children who registered under the Homeless Persons Act, from 62,920 in 1980 to 148,250 by 1992.[5] The Government's response was to talk of abolishing the Act altogether. In 1991 the sight of beggars and rough sleepers on the streets of London drove the Government to consider drastic measures. The financial health of the nation, they said, was tied to visitors – tourists and businesspeople – feeling comfortable in the capital. Yet photographs and articles by foreign visitors had started to appear in the world's press asking: how could Britain have allowed its citizens to become so abject?

Homeless people had to be removed. Politically it was impossible to drive them off the streets without a huge outcry. So the Government responded by attempting to get them out of the downtown, West End, area of London and place them in hostels away from public inspection. The most important thing was to tidy up, to remove an eyesore. It now takes a speech by Princess Diana, of all people, to get thousands of homeless young people into public consciousness at all.

Around the world there are at the very least some 1.6 billion people – almost a third of the world's population – living in what the World Health Organization describes as 'life- or health-threatening' conditions.[6] The 'threat' may come from dangerous drinking water, bad sanitation, floods, landslips, pollution, overcrowding, bullets, bombs – any number of things that can make life more unsafe and unpleasant than is tolerable. The people who face such threats are homeless in the true meaning of the word; marginalized and excluded from the calculations of 'structural adjustment' that are usually responsible for making them so.

The margins or outlines of a thing, however, tell us what it looks like, what it really is and perhaps the shape of things to come. No society that discounts the value of its members is going to work for long. Any 'democracy' that sets out to exclude people as a matter of policy will end up being defined by them, driven by the very fear, insecurity and violence it has inflicted on them. A brave new world indeed.

No society that discounts the value of its members is going to work for long

You can see the results clearly in South Africa, where exclusion under apartheid took a very tangible form. Because people's homes are so crucial to everyday life they played an important part in the resistance to apartheid, through rent strikes and the township 'Civics' that organized them. The country is now one of the few places in the world where housing is at the top of the political agenda. But the process of creating homes where people can live in peace is still fraught with difficulty.

MARTIN ADLER / PANOS PICTURES

Violation in Vukovar: two million shelled out of their homes in the former Yugoslavia.

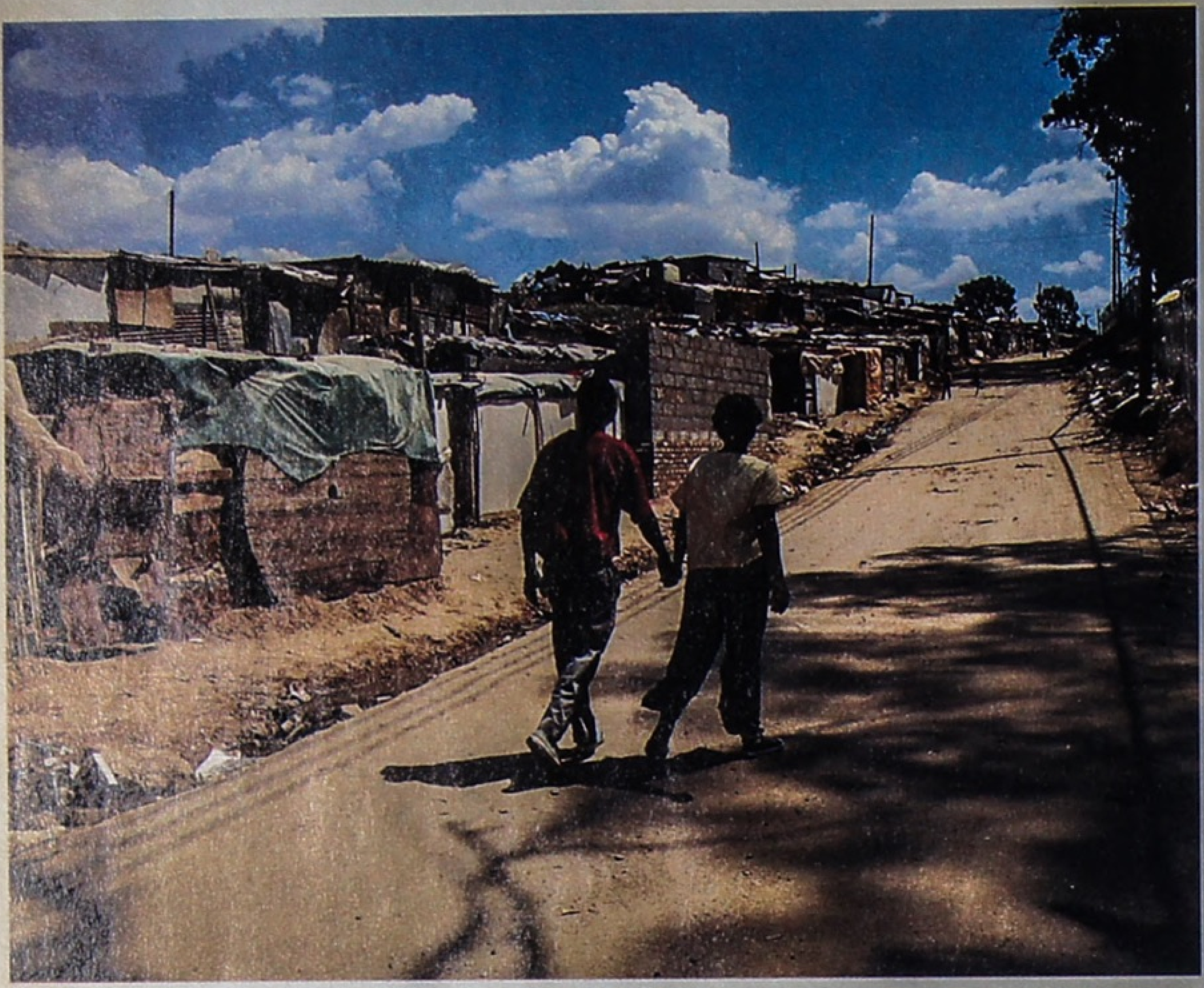
Slipping down the property ladder: human and material neglect come together in an American nightmare.

CHRISTOPHER PILLITZ / NETWORK

'To the vast majority of South Africa's poor,' says Ted Bauman of People's Dialogue on Land and Shelter, 'housing is not a "commodity". For the people who matter most and who produce the most housing – the homeless poor – it is an aspect of everyday existence, much like carrying water, obtaining fuel or cooking food. It is not an "event", as portrayed in bank mortgage-loan adverts, in the part where the bank manager hands over the keys to the smiling family. Housing is an urgent and never-ending process of shelter provision in which poor people are engaged for most of their lives.

'By focusing on housing as a product, current debate implicitly embraces the mortgage-advert view, which is of relevance only to the relatively wealthy – those who can afford to purchase everything in a "market" and have lost the ability to supply their own human needs anyway. Even worse, this assumption implicitly devalues the people's housing process. Even though appropriately-supported, people-produced housing is cheaper, quicker and more suited to the needs of the poor, in South Africa it is considered "substandard" because it is not a commodity. It is therefore seen as a part of the problem, not the solution.

'The Third World is littered with the results of this kind of thinking: housing developments which either turn to slums or end up in the hands of the rich; cities in the middle of nowhere; environmental degrada-


KAYTE BRIMACOMBE / NETWORK

Hand in hand in Alexandra: new housing for black South Africans is still dream rather than reality.

tion. In almost every instance, these are the results of a failure not only to "consult the community", but to follow and support them in their own efforts. Conversely, where "development" has been successful – by which we mean that it results in vibrant, sustainable communities – it has been in those rare cases where people took as their starting point what communities were already doing, and concentrated on supporting them... It's never too late to learn.'[7]

The homeless people who make up People's Dialogue have spent a long time thinking, before building anything at all. Their thinking also includes 'dreaming': imagining the ideal home, discussing it with others, perhaps even making full-scale paper models, and then deciding what is practical. Only then do they look for land, finance, materials, all the resources necessary for homes they will eventually build for themselves.

A decent home is a basic necessity of life, a fundamental human right

This is where the political battle for inclusion, rather than exclusion, really begins. Making decent homes depends on many things that individuals – even large, well-organized groups – cannot possibly achieve on their own. Clean water, sanitation and electricity have to be available; the environmental impact must be considered with care. The location must provide access to work, social networks and leisure. Affordable finance is critical too.

None of these things, in South Africa or anywhere else, can be provided without the political will. Where homes function as private property in a speculative, market-driven society this political will is notoriously absent, so the politics of exclusion flourish. But where housing is thought of simply as a tool of policy by bureaucratic state machines the resulting ghettos – exclusion in another form – are hardly much better.

What is needed is some fresh thinking and a different kind of political will. This has to begin by accepting that a decent home is a basic necessity of life, a fundamental human right. Such a right exists regardless of money – after all, no other human right is conditional on cash. Once this has been accepted, other things follow. Someone who has this right must be heard and not excluded. What makes a 'decent' home can only be judged by the people who live there, whose views are therefore the real foundations on which any useful building must rest. The public function of democratic government does not vanish. It remains to protect us from abuse and deliver essentials like public services, affordable credit, environmental protection.

If we are liberated from the dictatorship of market forces it becomes possible to imagine the unimaginable. Perhaps it would be better for everyone, in the long run, if no-one could sell their home for more than they paid for it; if people with an excess of two or three bedrooms had an obligation to take in those who have no home at all; if no-one had the right to own more than one home; if forms of ownership and finance developed that were neither state nor private but controlled by local communities; if land had no monetary value; if homeless people had a right to occupy and renovate empty 'property'.

The point of this is not that we need an unworkable wish-list to be presented to some kind of unelectable putative government. It is to free our minds from the bondage of market forces, to use our imagination and to work out for ourselves what is practical. Younger people in the North for whom good jobs and dream homes are more of a fantasy than anything we have suggested are, here and there, beginning to do just this. But for the most part it is to the South that we must look for inspiration for a genuinely brave new world.

There is a chance to learn these lessons at the UN Habitat II World Conference on Human Settlements – the 'City Summit' – set for Istanbul in June. Given Turkey's appalling human-rights record, Istanbul may be a curious place in which to learn them. The US Government has also been doing its utmost to stifle progress: the UN Centre for Human Settlements running the Conference has, in Scott Leckie's words, 'reduced itself to a fearful and lacklustre bystander, afraid of pursuing its mandate if this does not conform with Washington's demands'.[2]

But the politics of exclusion cannot endure forever. On the face of it the woman who slips the key to the dream home she can no longer afford through the letterbox of the bank and disappears into the night with her children has little in common with the woman who retrieves what she can from the ruins of a cleared slum in Manila and sets out in search of somewhere else to squat. The experience of homelessness and exclusion is, however, much the same wherever you are. Common humanity can never finally be denied. ■

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[1] Comments received directly from Bruce Harris in Guatemala City. [2] Scott Leckie is a lawyer and the author of *When Push Comes to Shove: Forced Evictions and Human Rights*, Habitat International Coalition, Utrecht, 1995. [3] See, for example, David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion*, Routledge, London, 1995. [4] *The Guardian*, 30 October 1995. [5] Jill Mann and Alistair Smith, *Who Says There's No Housing Problem?* Shelter, London, second edition, 1993. [6] *Our Planet, Our Health*, Report of the WHO Commission on Health and Environment, WHO Geneva, 1992. [7] From *People's Dialogue Backyard e-mail*, vol 1, no 3, 20 November 1995, PO Box 34639, Groote Schuur 7937, South Africa.

street talk

london

Max Stone I was an unhappy child, constantly attempting to kill time. I used to wander for hours, often late into the night. My father suspected I was gay and threw me out. I found myself on the streets. It was a bewildering experience. I travelled to London to explore the 'city opportunity'.

After a year of sleeping rough I enrolled for education and rented a flat. I propelled the pain behind me. Two years later the flat was declared unsafe and a health hazard. I rented a room in a house. I was forced to leave by a violent and sexually intrusive landlord. What a bleak future I faced then! I slept rough in parks and on friends' floors. Forced to look into myself, I discovered the source of my problems and made many important changes. My outlook on life was refreshed.

When I moved into this hostel I found the idea of sleeping in a tiny room with four bare white walls, a broken mattress and a naked light bulb suffocating and depressing. I'll soon be moved on to a flat of my own. I hope it'll work out, but who knows what life has in store?

MAX STONE is a pen-name. He gave this interview to *The Big Issue*, London.

johannesburg

Thuli Mabena I was born on 15 April 1979 – at Witbank in the township called Kwaguqa. My mother was only 16 years old when I was born and she was still at school. When I was three she went to Pretoria to find a job. She stayed there about ten years. At that time I was staying with my grandparents and their children.

Then one of my mother's sisters bought herself a house. So we stayed together until my mother came back. The problem started when my mother and her sister started drinking together. They were driving me nuts. So one day I told them I didn't like what they were doing. My mother's sister chased me out and said: 'This is my house. Pack your bags and go.' And that time I didn't know where to go.

I thought I must go to Jo'burg because I'd seen street children on the TV and I thought maybe I would meet friends. In Jo'burg I met a girl called Nokuthula. She told me she was staying at Park Station. That night we went to sleep in the movies.

In the morning we went to Benoni Children's Home. We stayed about four months. But the girls there hit and hurt us. The time came when we couldn't take it any more. We decided to go to another home in Jo'burg.

THULI MABENA lives in Johannesburg. She gave this interview to *Homeless Talk*.

los angeles

Scott Henry Turner I arrived in Hollywood early in 1993. The only thing that kept me going was the underlying will to survive away from the battleground I used to call home. I held on to the company of one guy for a while to try and learn my way around Los Angeles. He and I bounced around the city for some weeks, going from shelter to shelter until we lost each other. By this time I had stopped sleeping at night because it was too risky and cold outside. I hid in parking lots because they can't kill you or rape you if they can't find you. I always was, and still am, good at becoming invisible.

After two months of waiting I made it into the youth shelter of the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center in Hollywood. I lived there for a year and a half, went through several jobs and finally moved into my own apartment this year. Soon I will learn to love myself.

SCOTT HENRY TURNER has been a Peer Educator/Actor at the LA Free Clinic in Hollywood. His life story has been told in the LA street paper *Street Scene*.

paris

Alain Fonteneau The consumer market is a trap! I refuse to fall into it. On the farm where I used to live in Anjou we had no car and we never went to the cinema. My parents never had any savings.

I am the only one among six brothers and sisters to have got so far with my studies. When I got a degree in agricultural sciences at Nantes I knew there would be few openings – I would have liked to pursue my research into fungi that attack vines.

I taught biology for more than a year in different schools. But I was not cut out for it. In April 1992 I left Anjou for Paris. I saw posters on literacy at the hostel where I was staying. That gave me the idea of starting a course for residents, who were mostly foreigners. The hostel lent me a room and I began in December 1993. At the beginning of the summer holidays the classes ended.

After that I became a vendor for *La Rue*. I do not feel very comfortable, but it does enable me to meet different people, to have discussions with them and hand out my CV. I feel as free as someone who earns a lot. I have decided to do without anything superfluous. We must stand up to this society where consumption has become a hard drug.

ALAIN FONTENEAU gave this interview to *La Rue*, Paris.

EUGENE RICHARDS / MAGNUM

street
talk

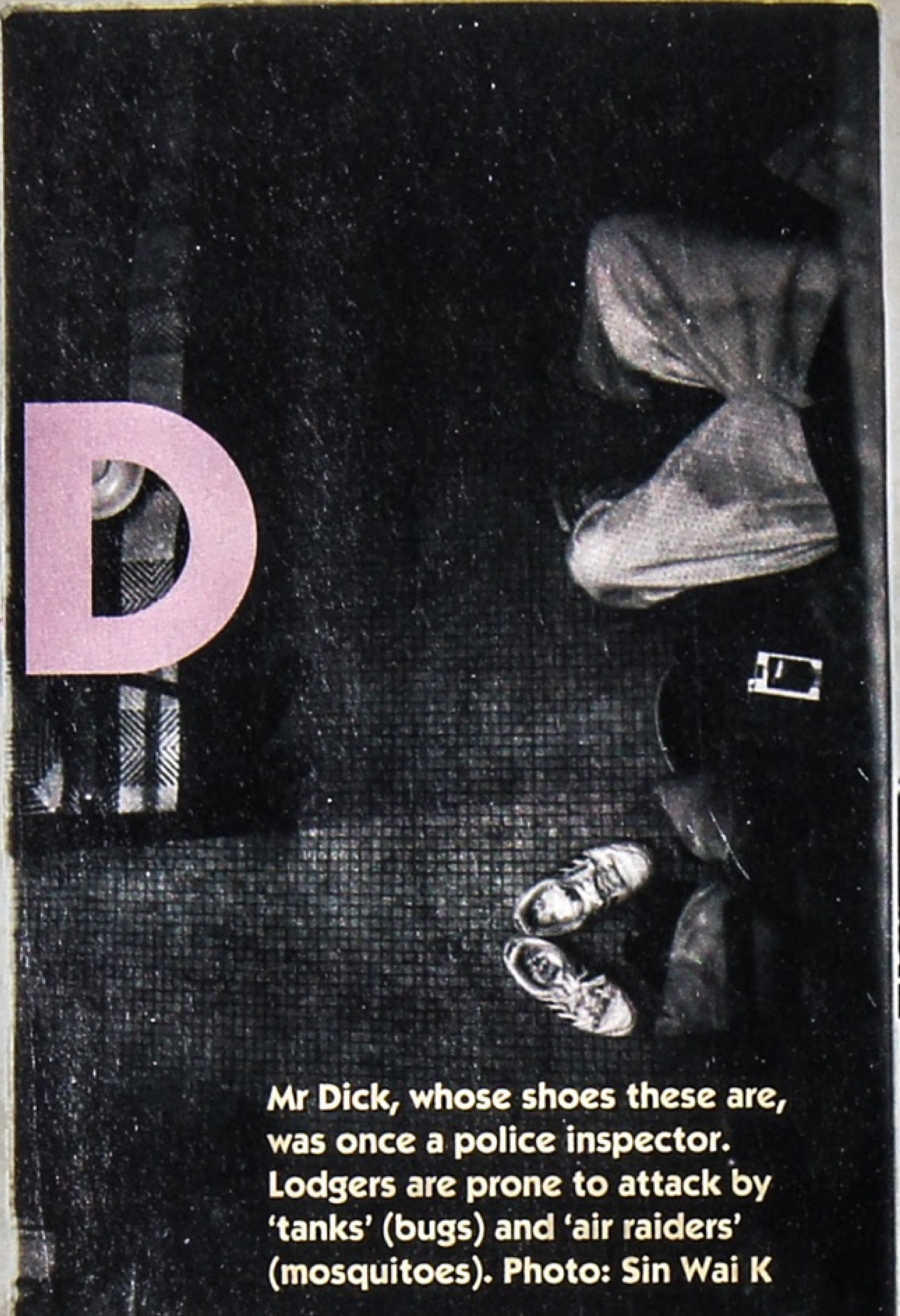
The people in these photographs are now too old to make economic miracles in Hong Kong; some 10,000 of them live as outcasts in cages near the heart of the city.

CAGED

In 'bedspace apartments' of 100 people or more they occupy a single bed in rows of bunks two or three tiers high. To protect themselves and create a symbolic sense of privacy some fix wire and locks around their bunks, which have come to be called 'cage-homes'.

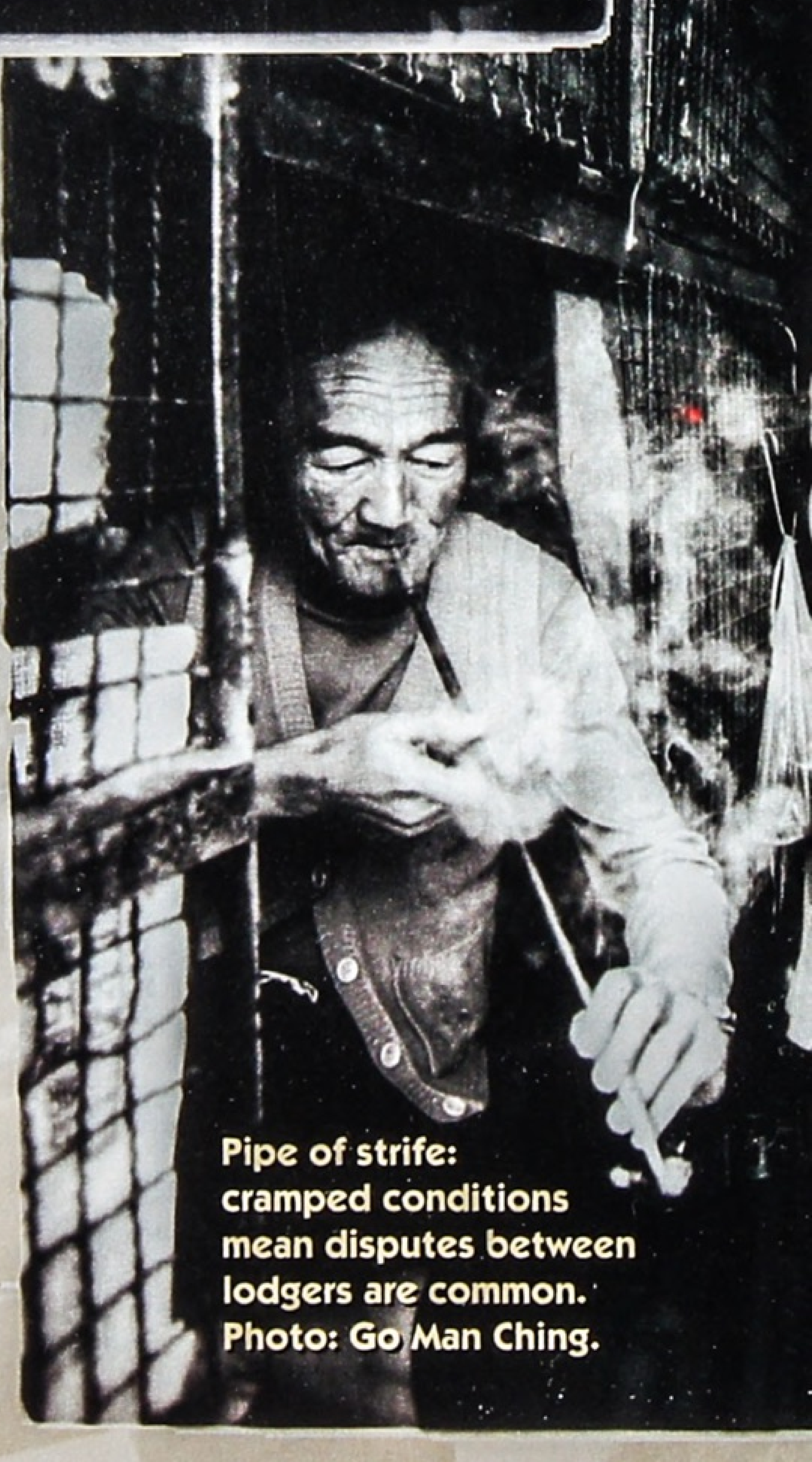
The lodgers receive a maximum pension from the Hong Kong Government of $232 per month, and pay on average $64 for their cages. They live in constant fear of fire, theft and the spread of disease. Most suffer from respiratory illness.

On Christmas Eve 1990 six people were killed and 50 injured in a cage-apartment fire in Shamshuipo. On Lunar New Year's Day in 1993 Mok Choi, an elderly



Mr Dick, whose shoes these are, was once a police inspector. Lodgers are prone to attack by 'tanks' (bugs) and 'air raiders' (mosquitoes). Photo: Sin Wai K

'I have a feeling that I am an animal inside a zoo, being observed from all sides,' says this lodger. Photo: Leung Yiu Wing.



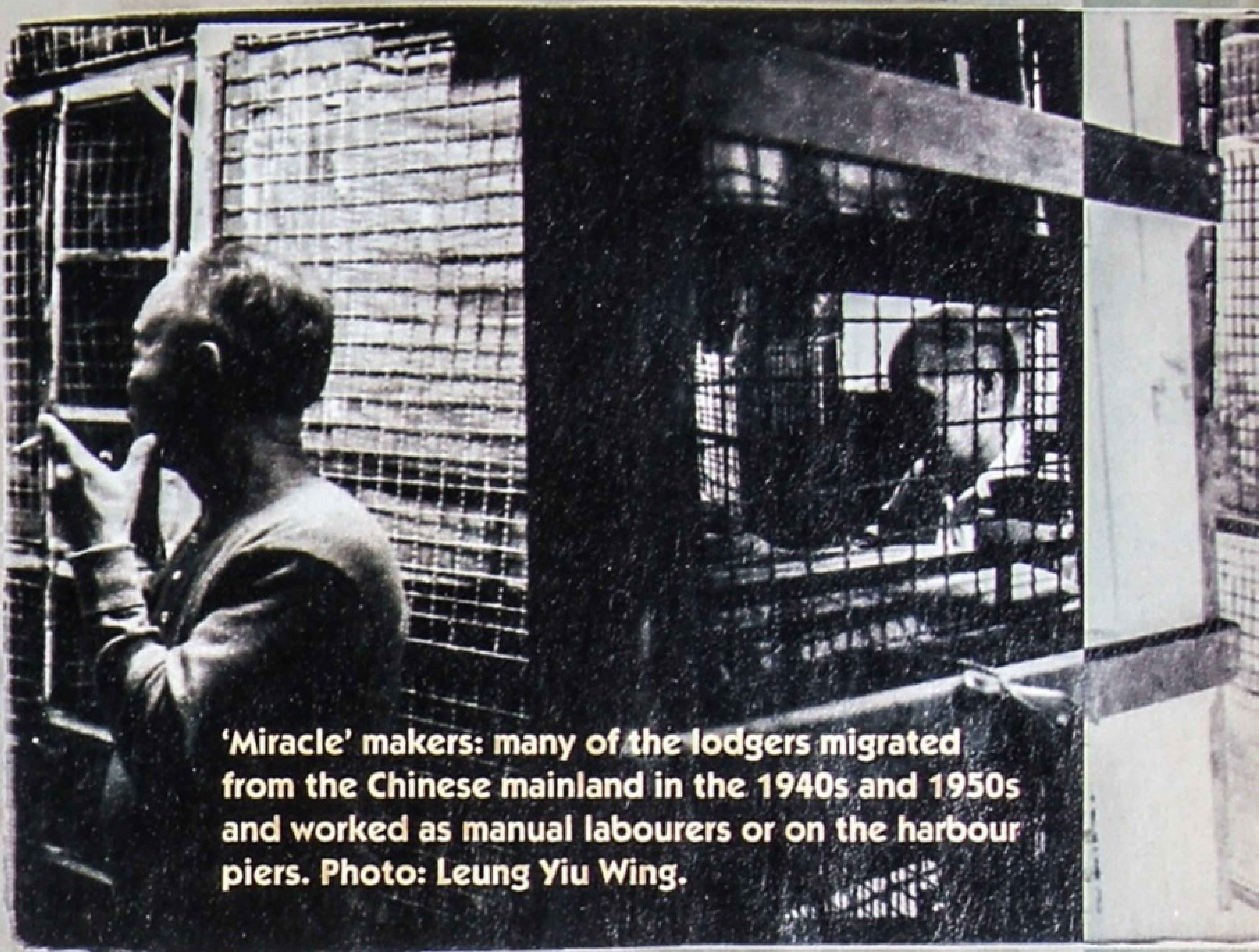
Pipe of strife: cramped conditions mean disputes between lodgers are common. Photo: Go Man Ching.

lady, froze to death in the cage-apartment at 56 Fuk Tsuen Street.

The apartment blocks are constantly being demolished. The lodgers have no security and so must somehow find another cage-home. Protests have been made to the Hong Kong Government, which has so far made little positive response.

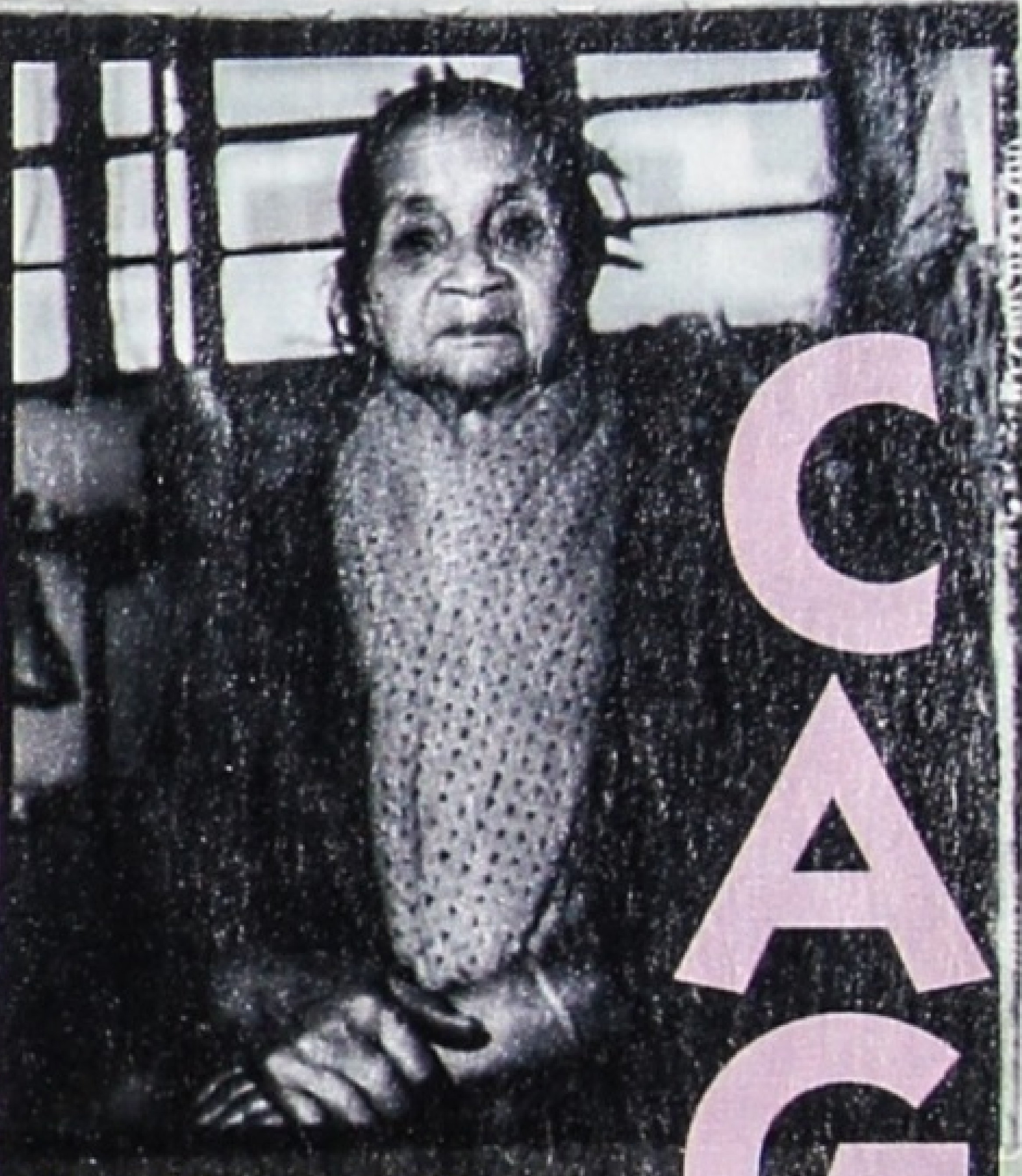
The pictures that appear here were taken with the permission of the lodgers, to support the protest.

Ho Hei Wah
Society for Community
Organization, Hong Kong



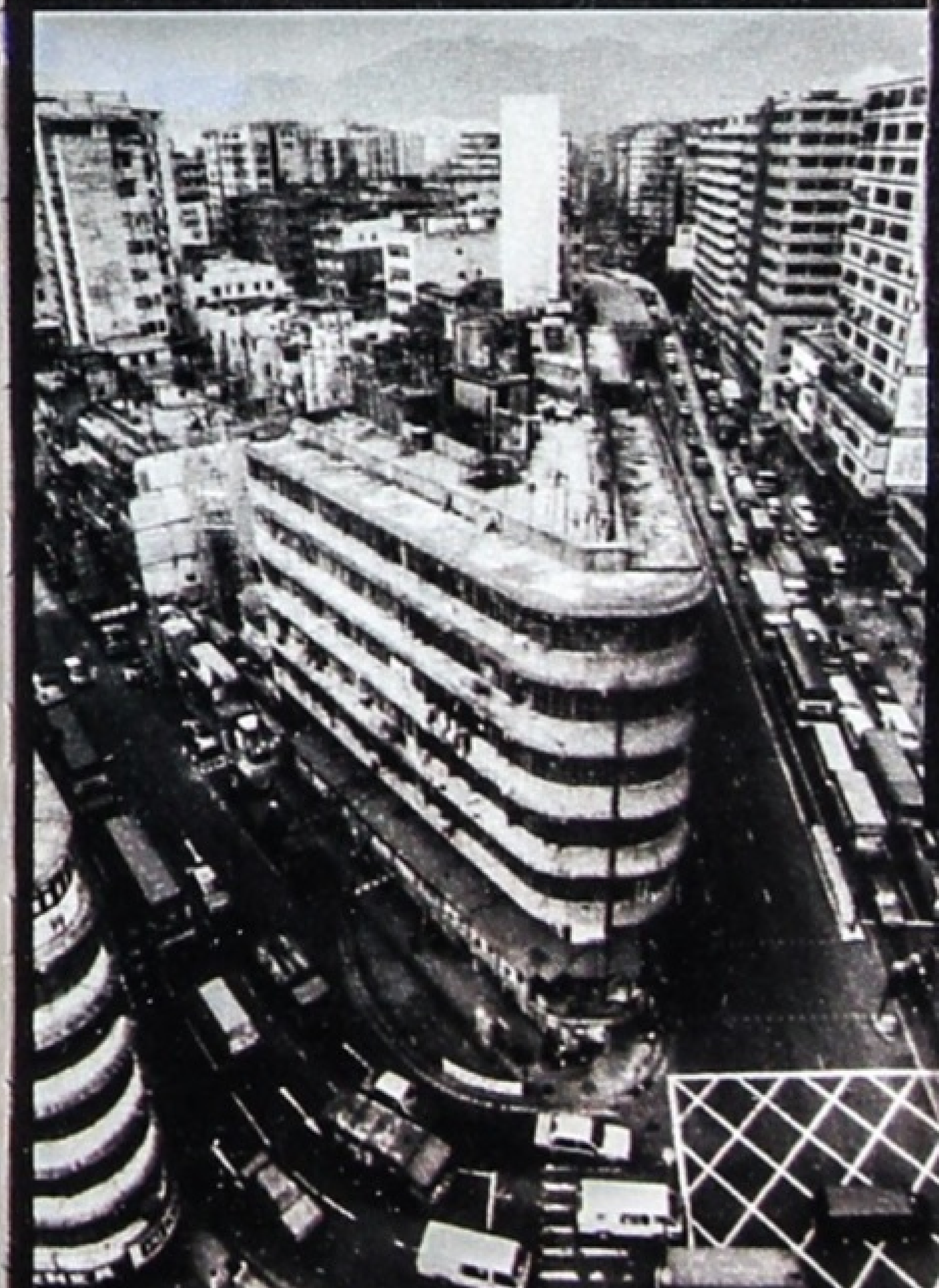
'Miracle' makers: many of the lodgers migrated from the Chinese mainland in the 1940s and 1950s and worked as manual labourers or on the harbour piers. Photo: Leung Yiu Wing.

CAGED



Chan Yin: she's 76 and has lived in a cage for 30 years. In mainland China she mowed grass and sun-dried sugar cane. Her daughter is 60. Photo: Kevin, Lee On Man.

Cage-apartment crush: 400 lodgers were evicted from this building in May 1991. It was demolished and replaced by a 20-storey luxury residential tower block. Photo: Suen Shu Kwan.



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Scared of our own kids

Nowhere are street children more organized than in Brazil. **Anthony Swift** investigates.

The poor Santa Marta community that climbs a near-vertical flank of Rio's Corcovado mountain is mirror-imaged in the windows of skyscrapers. Construction workers can look out from their precarious dwellings directly at the homes they helped build for the middle- and upper-income classes. And the latter can look back, wondering how to fortify those homes further against neighbours who might turn to self-help redistribution. All can look up to the beneficent Christ on the summit.

Step out of the dream world of consumers choosing new possessions in the latest shopping mall, pass the armed security guards at the entrance, and you take your chance in a world where unlicenced hawkers – parents of poor children – are driven from the streets by municipal police.

Then there is the killing of poor people with impunity, including children, by police and death squads. Death squads operate on the more ragged sections of the frontier between haves and have-nots, where the paid guardians of 'public security' officially leave off. It is said they kill a thousand or so youngsters a year.

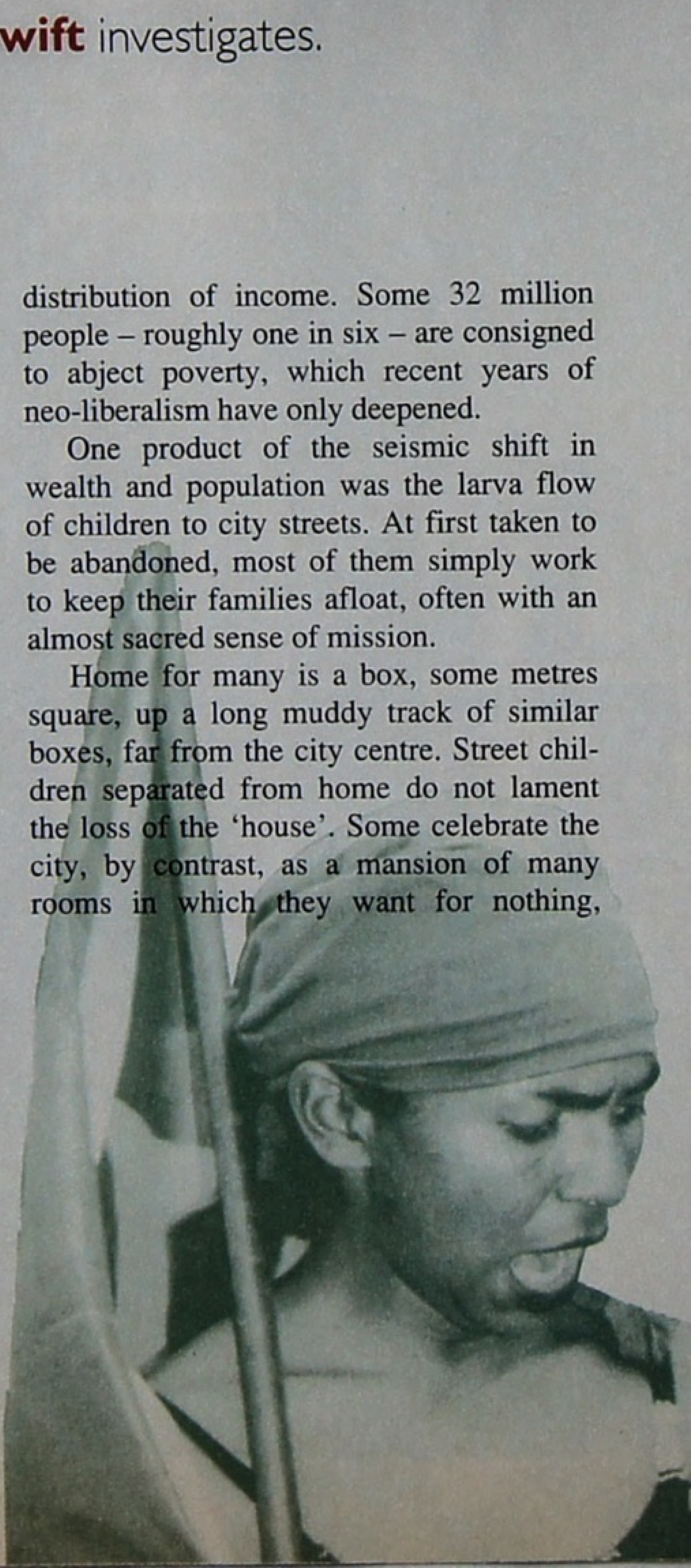
'The situation of children on our streets is terrible. But they can be very dangerous,' said a woman in a restaurant, her real concern short-circuiting to fear. 'They robbed my brother at gun-point. For their own good, we should put them in institutions as we used to.'

'We are a population scared of its own children,' says Padre Bruno Sechi, a pioneer of children's participation in the struggle for their rights. 'This is a terrible distortion of social relations.. We are becoming an imprisoned society, locking up people who have nothing and then locking ourselves up in fortress homes. With this system we are making life impossible.'

Twenty years of capitalism conniving with dictatorship produced Brazil's industrial 'economic miracle' and compounded its social nightmare. Many of the rural poor abandoned the land, or were expelled by ruthless landowners and grandiose development schemes. While a few Brazilians made fortunes, drifts of misery accumulated on 'invasion' land on city peripheries. Today among the top ten economic powers, Brazil has the world's greatest disparity in distribution of income. Some 32 million people – roughly one in six – are consigned to abject poverty, which recent years of neo-liberalism have only deepened.

One product of the seismic shift in wealth and population was the larva flow of children to city streets. At first taken to be abandoned, most of them simply work to keep their families afloat, often with an almost sacred sense of mission.

Home for many is a box, some metres square, up a long muddy track of similar boxes, far from the city centre. Street children separated from home do not lament the loss of the 'house'. Some celebrate the city, by contrast, as a mansion of many rooms in which they want for nothing,



describing the restaurant district as their kitchen, the city park as their garden, its lakes or beachfront as their bathroom. And the adults whom they rob or serve in various ways they dignify as 'clients'. What pains them sharply is the loss of the caring they once had, or know they should have had, from their families before the final blows of poverty put paid to that.

Children grow to reflect the world they live in. 'I realized that to survive I had to become cold and hard and turned in on myself. I had to be tougher and meaner than anyone else, or befriend someone who was meaner,' said a girl about her first days working on the streets. It's those who learn the lessons of sociopathology too well whom society's death squads, in a final twist of the knife, then earmark for disposal.

What is becoming clear is that marginalization is not only something that happens *to* the poor, it happens also *inside* them, individually and collectively, and it happens *inside* us whose choices marginalize them. What is marginalized is our humanity. It is this process and not just the symptoms – among them homelessness – we need to tackle.

If there is a miracle in Brazil it is that this definition is being honed to an ever-finer sharpness – not by the professionals, or the politicians, but by the people of the periphery themselves, not least street, working and poor-community children.

Almost a thousand children and adolescents aged between 7 and 17, and 200 educators of the National Movement of Street Boys and Girls, were bussed in from every state to the federal capital, Brasilia, last year to attend the Fourth National Meeting of Street Boys and Girls.

They met in circus tents in a city park and slept in an army barracks. Education, not housing, was their major theme. Not just any education. 'We want to be educated to be citizens,' was the cry.

On the second day – variously beating drums, on high stilts, astride a unicycle, dressed as clowns, or wearing fantastical masks or folklore outfits – they took their message to the Ministry of Education. They would make the education of their dreams a reality, they proclaimed before a grim line of security men.

Then to the National Congress. They funnelled into the basement parking area, between gleaming banks of cars and along a tunnel, their drum beats ricocheting off the walls, to emerge into the main building, claiming the space with a victory shout.

In the assembly hall they and their elected leaders – a teenage girl and boy – met with Ministers and other government and non-government representatives who compose the National Council for Children's Rights. They criticized the slow implementation of children's rights. 'Our rights are not respected and we are here to demand quality education for all.'

They wanted schools that recognized the realities of their lives. Many children from the periphery don't attend primary school or have to repeat years. Only 38 per cent of those who start complete. Many arrive at school tired and hungry after long hours of work. 'Schools should be in the peripheral areas where the children live, not miles across town.' 'Children should not be working. They should be in school. And there should be school meals.' Teachers, too, came to work tired. 'They must be paid proper salaries, instead of wages that force them to take two and even three teaching posts.'

As in previous meetings, the children also demanded an end to the violence. They cited the castration and killing of seven young boys in Altamira. 'There is a cover-up. The Government must track down the culprits and arrest them.' A boy from São Paulo told the council: 'We don't know how many children are being killed. It happens faster than we can follow it up. They are left to die on the ground like dogs.'

The development of the citizenship of the poor Brazilian child goes back 25 years, to the founding, during the dictatorship, of the Republic of Small Vendors in Belem. But a new momentum was achieved with the National Movement of Street Boys and Girls, established in 1985, the year the dictatorship died. Started by 'street educators' – outreach workers employed in government and non-government organizations – the Movement has made Brazil a world leader in the participation and organization of children.

National meetings were proposed when children from different programmes met together in Belem. The first in 1986 – referred to as the 'first cry' – caused a sensation and helped make children's rights a banner for the nation's thrust for democracy. The children's accounts of their lives helped inform a new children's clause in the post-dictatorship constitution and prodded society to take a new look at the young lives it discards.

Each meeting has had an impact on the progress of children's rights. The Second in 1989 exposed the killing of children, triggering publicity that forced the Government to recognize the problem. The children 'invaded' the congress and addressed the policy makers directly, stimulating support for the passage of the progressive Statute for Children's Rights.

The Third meeting urged implementation of the Statute, particularly the setting up

ALL PHOTOS ANTHONY SWIFT

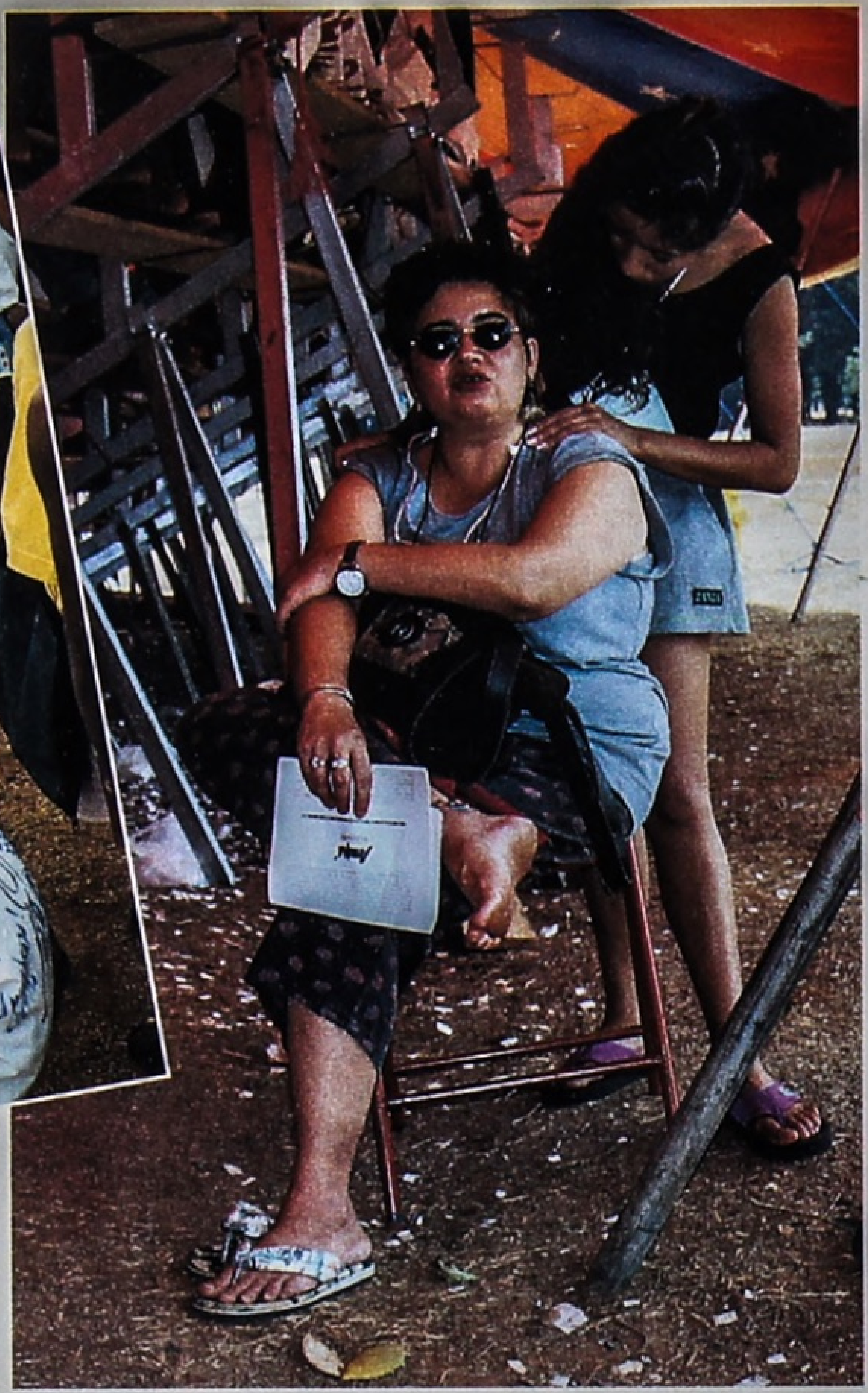
Descending on the Congress in Brasilia: the National Movement of Street Boys and Girls in action.

of policy-making rights councils at municipal, state and federal levels. The Fourth heralded the intention of poor children to present their ideas to the new councils, which are composed equally of government appointees and elected representatives of civil society.

A triumph of the National Movement is that the children's concern about their rights is not theoretical but grounded in their experience with the movement's educators.

One route of the educators' work is liberation theology. Another is grassroots socialism, which proliferated during the dictatorship when other overt forms were crushed – the building of socialist relationships from the social base rather than the seizing of power by a revolutionary *avant guarde*.

Trained by the Movement, most educators are themselves from poor backgrounds and their work for the Movement is voluntary. At its heart is the playful, respectful and reliable companionship they offer the children. They attract them into small groups (*nucleos de base*) organized around any strong common problem or interest, wherever children are – in projects, streets, poor neighbourhoods or schools.



Signatures and sympathy: children sign each other's T-shirt (left) and relieve an educator's pain (right).

Through imaginative educational workshops and recreational activities, the children dialogue about their lives, their problems and those of their community. They decide on courses of action and then review the consequences. Decisions are taken and leaders elected democratically, with the participation of all actively encouraged. The educator facilitates. Wherever possible parents and communities are invited to support the process. Through their activities the children gain experience of inclusion, solidarity, co-operation, self-interest identified with that of the community – all the besieged cultural values of the black, indian and other groups who compose the majority of the poor. And they gain a critical consciousness of society and their ability to act in it.

It is in these small groups that the planning of the National Meetings begins, recommendations being carried forward by elected delegates to municipal- and state-level meetings. Delegates from the latter compose a National Commission that plans and executes the next National Meeting. But there are other actions. Groups have challenged municipal authorities over the abuse of children by the police; exposed local community health hazards and made the information available to residents' associations; challenged sloppy educational practice in schools. With the statute in place, their efforts will increasingly be directed at the new municipal children's-rights councils.

The educators strive to reverse the process of marginalization, reinforcing both their and the children's humanity and awakening the citizenship of both. Patricia Cordeiro, an educator with street children in Belem, describes the process: 'In this work you come to realize that the abandonment of children takes place within the framework of the wider abandonment of many Brazilians. And you are from this layer too, though you did have some advantages and they enabled you to survive the hunger, which is not only for food, but also for compassion and justice. I had a very bad school. But I had a school. I have a very poor family. But I have a family. And this child on the street has lost, or risks losing, all the links that I by chance maintained. So today the idea that motivates me is of these children discovering themselves to be citizens and beginning to assert their right, and that of other dispossessed people, to a role in society.

'Their families cannot do that for them alone. Some are even more abandoned than they. So it has to come from a group like ours that commits itself to this process of transformation. Once we know this, we become very political and see that what we are doing is right. Then Patricia, the educator, is no longer somebody who just plays with the child on the street but someone who intervenes directly and politically when someone beats up this child, or when that child rips someone off. Why do I do it? Because if people like me, who have had the luck to survive poverty and the opportunity to experience the problems of these children, fail to intervene, then, I wonder, how will this society ever change?'

Children come to love their groups. The younger ones say they value most the 'warmth', the 'touch', the concern of the educators; older ones the sense of solidarity, the discussion and the insight they gain.

An 11-year-old delegate to the Fourth Meeting batted my question back in disbelief: 'What would I do if there was no *nucleo de base*? I would go right out and start one.'

But did she really believe the Government would act on their demands? 'We shall see. This is very new,' she said. 'Of one thing you can be sure: we will keep on coming.' ■

Anthony Swift is writing a book, *Children for Social Change*, about the participation and organization of children.

Smoke gets in your throat

The semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Maasai is under threat from market forces. **Nick Hall** describes how Maasai women are developing new housing options of their own.

A MAASAI WOMAN may walk five, ten or even twenty miles a day to collect water for her family. But when the rains begin she is still not able to relax. This is the time when she will work hardest on her house, repairing leaking roofs and crumbling walls.

The Maasai are pastoralists, grazing their cattle over the plains which border Kenya and Tanzania. The status of a Maasai man is directly related to the number and quality of the cattle he owns which, traditionally, he would never sell. A Maasai woman, however, has control over housing. When she marries, her first task is to build her own house, helped by other women in the homestead. This house belongs to her and no-one may enter without her permission. Throughout her life she will build a new house every ten years or so.

But life for pastoralists is changing. During the colonial period attempts were made to persuade the Maasai to swap their traditional cattle-centred life for one based on cash. Group ranches were set up to tempt them to make money from their animals. After independence in the 1960s the World Bank put pressure on the Government to step up this process as a way of bringing the Maasai into the money-earning community.

The Kenyan Government was already embarrassed at the 'primitive' label which had been attached to the Maasai. It did not suit its self-image as an emerging nation that the Maasai – who have always fascinated Westerners – should be considered a quaint relic from a time before capitalism.

Some Kenyans saw the opportunity to make a great deal of money. In 1986 the Government began to subdivide the group ranches into individual farms. Mysteriously, the best land often went to people with political connections, some of whom were not even Maasai. This land was often sold on to big landowners at increasing profit.

To begin with most Maasai did not realize the importance of what was happening. It did not take long, however, before it began to dawn on them that they would no longer be able to move about as before – and neither would their cattle.

Traditionally, Maasai land and homes had no value – the one because it was available to all and the other because it needed only the labour of the women. Now they were becoming more valuable than their most prized possession, cattle. It was a startling reversal, involving every area of their lives.

INTERMEDIATE TECHNOLOGY

Maasai women learn new skills and plug the gaps with ferro-cement roofing.

Generally speaking, the Maasai are not poor in the way that slum dwellers are poor. They do not have permanent homes or running water, but they are independent, self-sufficient and proud. They certainly do not consider themselves disadvantaged and their lives are well-adapted to the conditions in which they live.

During the rainy season the Maasai live in homesteads – *enkang* – built usually on high ground, migrating during the dry season to temporary camps on the low-lying plains. After five to ten years they abandon their houses and build new ones.

Even so, a house designed to be lived in for part of the year is not going to be adequate as a permanent home. The walls tend to crack, for example, and women complain of having to get up in the middle of the night to bung up leaks. As the Maasai are supplementing their traditional diet of milk, meat and blood with tea, vegetables and grains, the women need to spend much more time cooking. This makes the old-style houses dangerously smoky. In February 1993 a study established that indoor air pollution in the form of carbon monoxide and particulates in Maasai rural housing was high – the highest ever recorded.

Maasai are now spending more and more time at home. The men cannot travel away with the cattle for such long periods and the women do not need to move to find somewhere else to live. Their houses have simply become too small for the needs of all the people who have to use them.

In the early 1990s women's groups from Kajiado District – traditionally a Maasai area – identified a need for better housing as their main concern. Maasai women wanted to adjust their traditional housing to their new situation.

Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG) suggested adding a thin, watertight ferro-cement coating on top of the wattle, mud and ash roof. The cement roof design includes guttering to channel rainwater into a catchment container.

However, it is not easy to alter one aspect of design in isolation. The new roof worked extremely well and rain could not get in; but neither could the smoke get out. ITDG had immediately to consider a new design of chimney. The way forward was obviously by consultation. A design workshop was held with representatives of 14 of the Women's Groups in August 1991 so that their views could be incorporated. ITDG is also helping to strengthen the women's capacity to raise and organize their own funds, and runs training sessions in the new technology for artisans.

Women are still the most active in making the Maasai home, although men are realizing its importance and becoming increasingly involved. Maasai women have always been independent and used to working together to help each other. If this community spirit can be mobilized to learn new skills and the Maasai can become aware of some of the technological options open to them, they will be in a good position to face the challenges of the new century. ■

Nick Hall works for Intermediate Technology.

Homelessness – The Facts

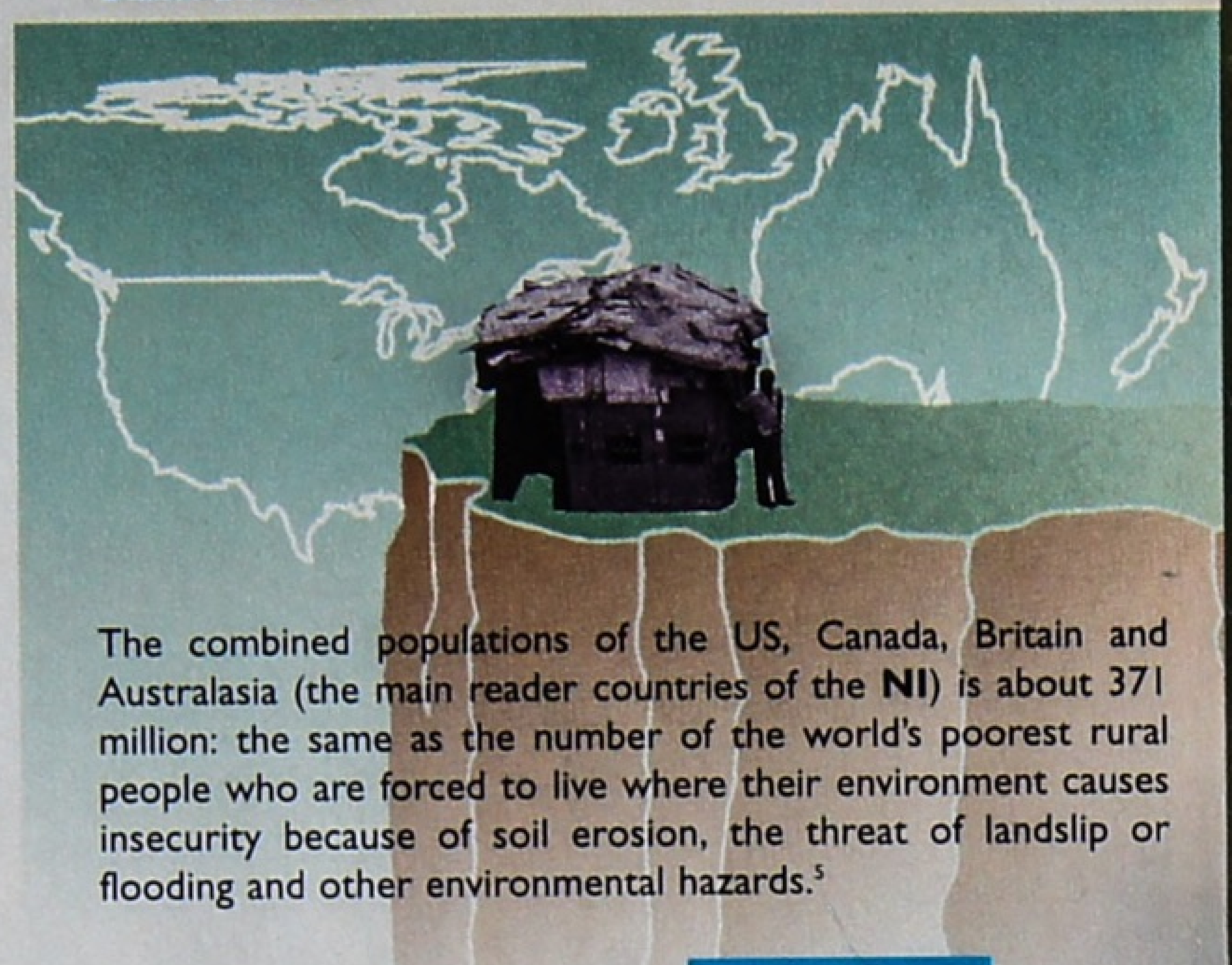
It takes more than a roof over your head to make a home. Worldwide, more than 1,600 million people live in 'life-threatening' and 'health-threatening' conditions – overcrowded and lacking in basic services.[1] That's almost a third of the world's population.

Under threat

No-one can feel at home when their life is threatened by illness and disease because of where they live.

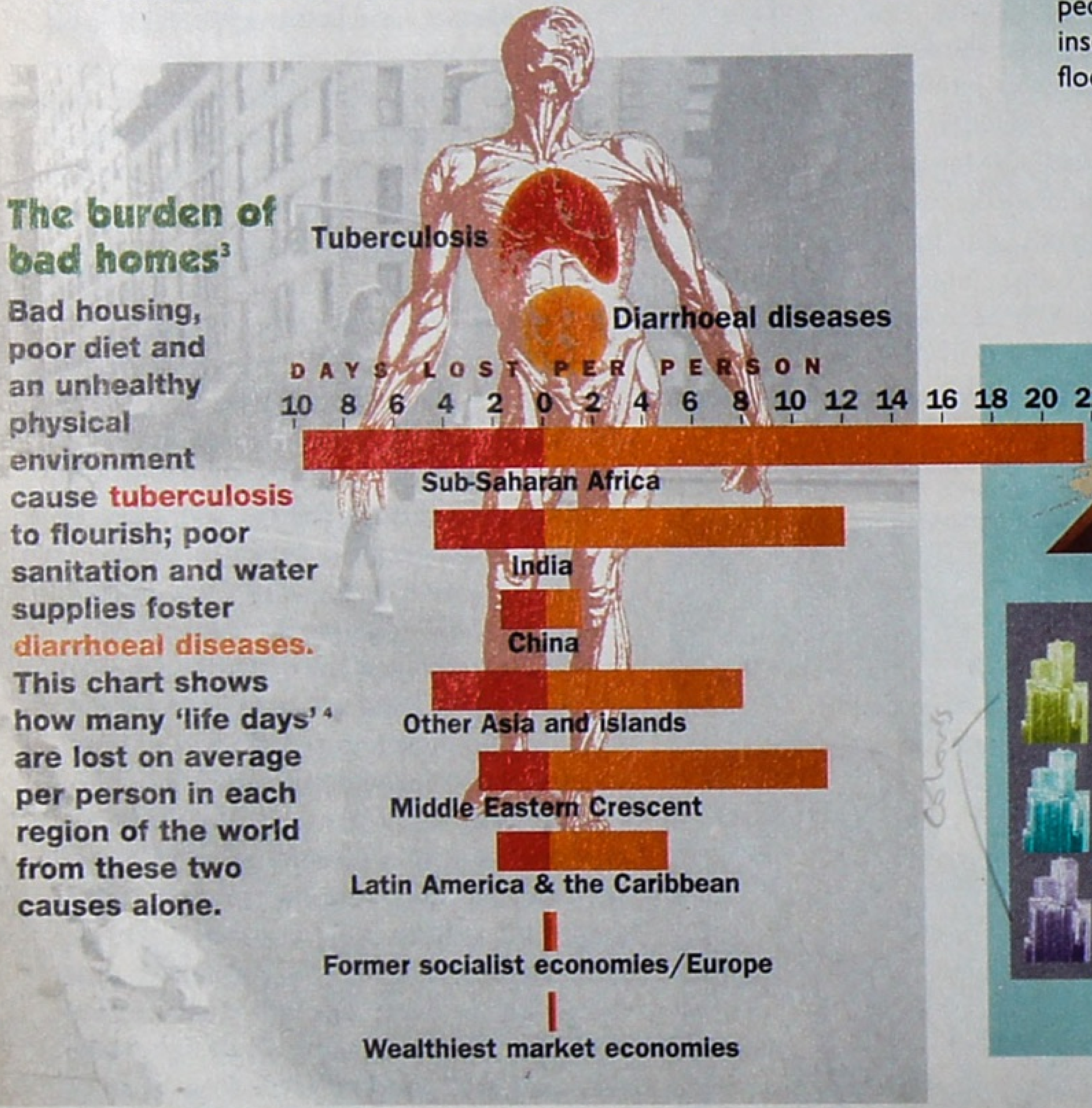
- ◆ Case studies of cities in Africa, Asia and Latin America show that it is common for at least 30% of the population to live either in illegal settlements with little or no infrastructure or services, or in overcrowded and often deteriorating tenements and cheap boarding-houses.[1]
- ◆ 18 million people in Latin America suffer from Chagas disease and 100 million are at risk. Infection occurs in low-income families in rural areas where poor housing provides breeding sites for the disease vector, the parasite Trypanosoma cruzi.[1]
- ◆ The incidence of rheumatic fever in developed countries is reported to be below 5 per 100,000 population, whereas in many developing countries, among children living in populations with overcrowded living conditions, it may approach 300 per 100,000.[1]
- ◆ 1.3 million homes in Britain are officially unfit for human habitation.[2]

Vulnerable

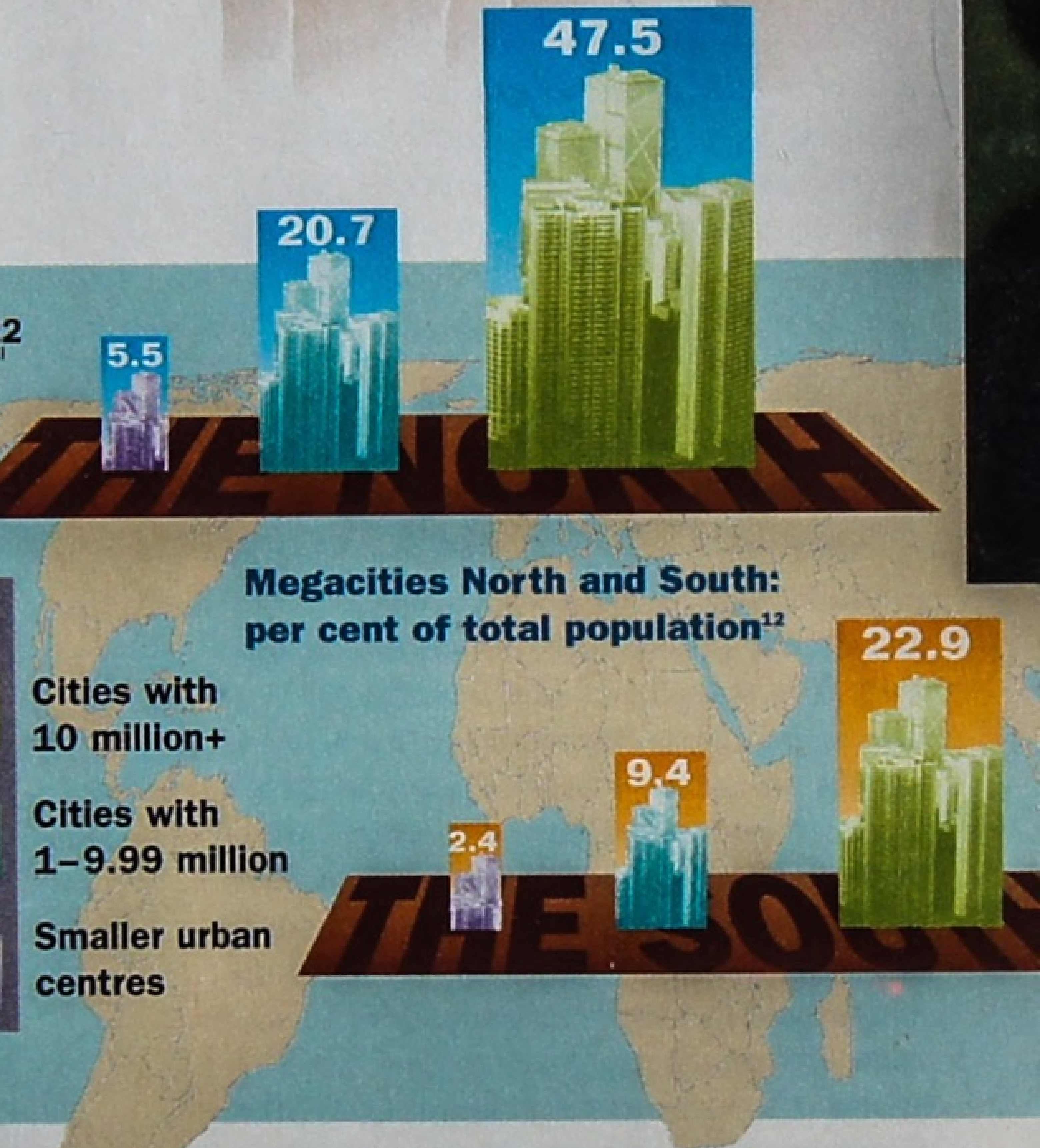


The combined populations of the US, Canada, Britain and Australasia (the main reader countries of the **NI**) is about 371 million: the same as the number of the world's poorest rural people who are forced to live where their environment causes insecurity because of soil erosion, the threat of landslip or flooding and other environmental hazards.[5]

The burden of bad homes[3]



Bad housing, poor diet and an unhealthy physical environment cause tuberculosis to flourish; poor sanitation and water supplies foster diarrhoeal diseases. This chart shows how many 'life days'[4] are lost on average per person in each region of the world from these two causes alone.

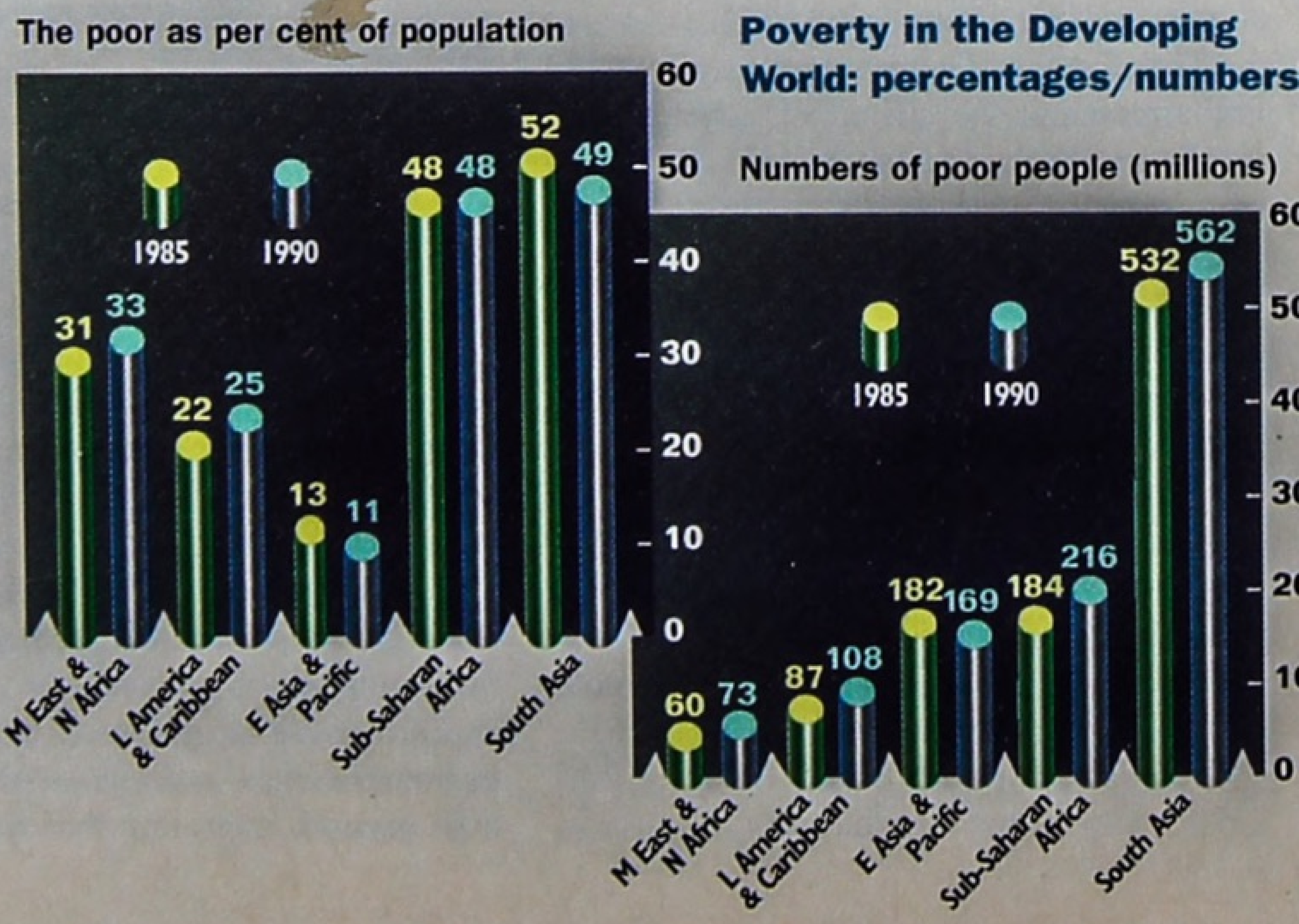


Megacities North and South: per cent of total population[12]

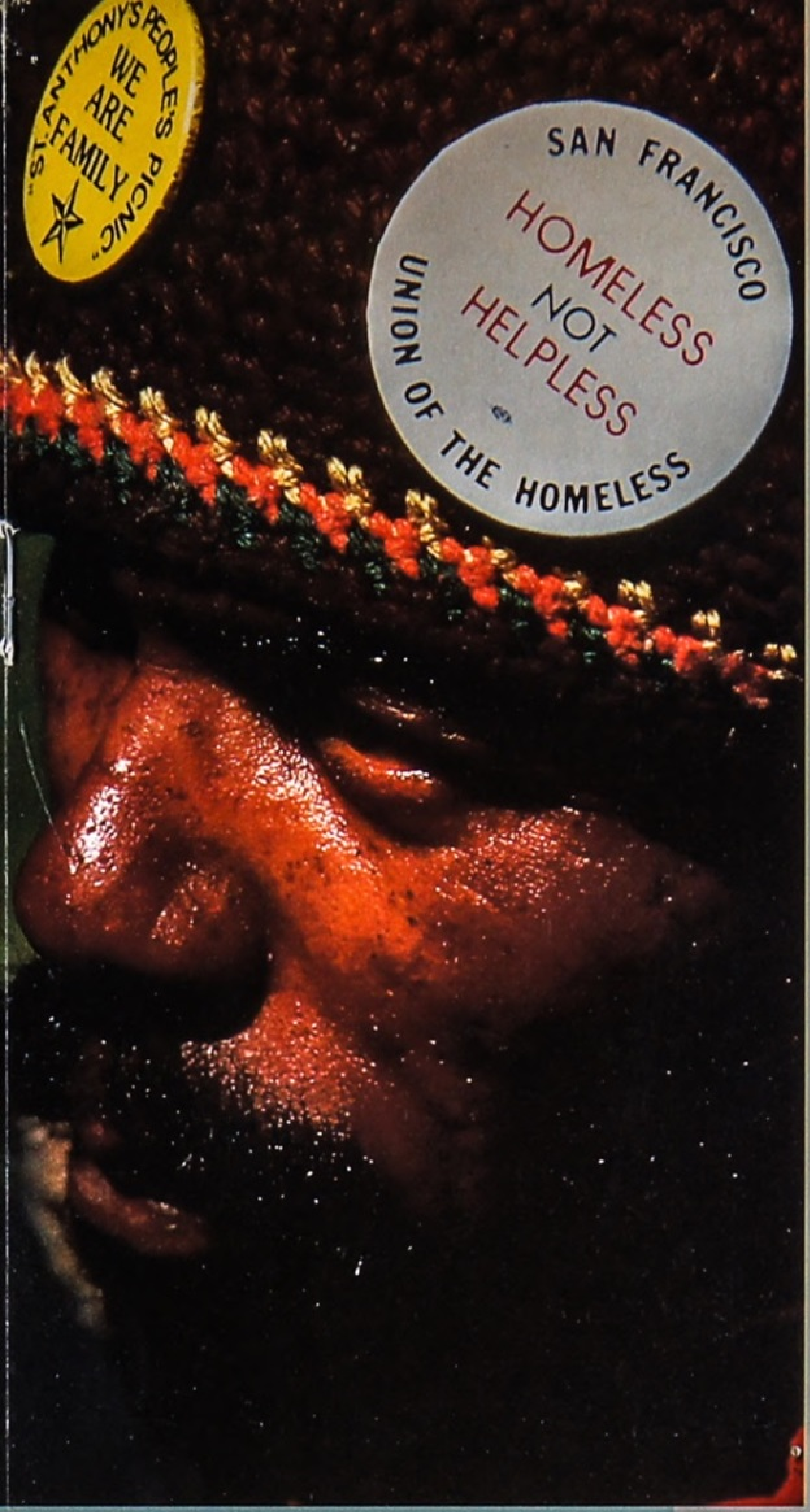
Poor

Hundreds of millions of people who lack the basic resources needed to make a decent home are left without one – and their number is growing. The proportion of poor people in the world has fallen slightly, but with a rising world population their total number is increasing fast.

- ◆ During the 1980s average incomes were reported to have fallen by 10% in most of Latin America and 20% in sub-Saharan Africa. In many urban areas wages have fallen by as much as 50%.[1]
- ◆ A recent summary of studies on the incidence of poverty in individual developing countries reveals levels regularly in excess of 50% of the population.[6]
- ◆ Inequality between rich and poor has grown as fast in the North as in the South: average real wages in the US have not increased at all for the past 10 years.[1]
- ◆ One in three children in Britain lives below the poverty line.[7]



Poverty in the Developing World: percentages/numbers[5]



MICHAEL K NICHOLS / MAGNUM

Third World in the First

Only very rough estimates are made of the number of homeless people in the wealthy countries of the 'North'; but all of them show that the number has been increasing sharply.

◆ In the US a very conservative estimate of the number of people sleeping on the streets or in shelters increased from 125,000 in 1980 to 324,000 by 1990.[9]

◆ Anywhere between 130,000 and 250,000 people sleep rough or in night shelters in Canada.[10]

◆ In Britain, the number of 'households' (on average comprising more than two people) officially accepted as homeless more than doubled from 62,920 in 1980 to 148,250 by 1992.[11]

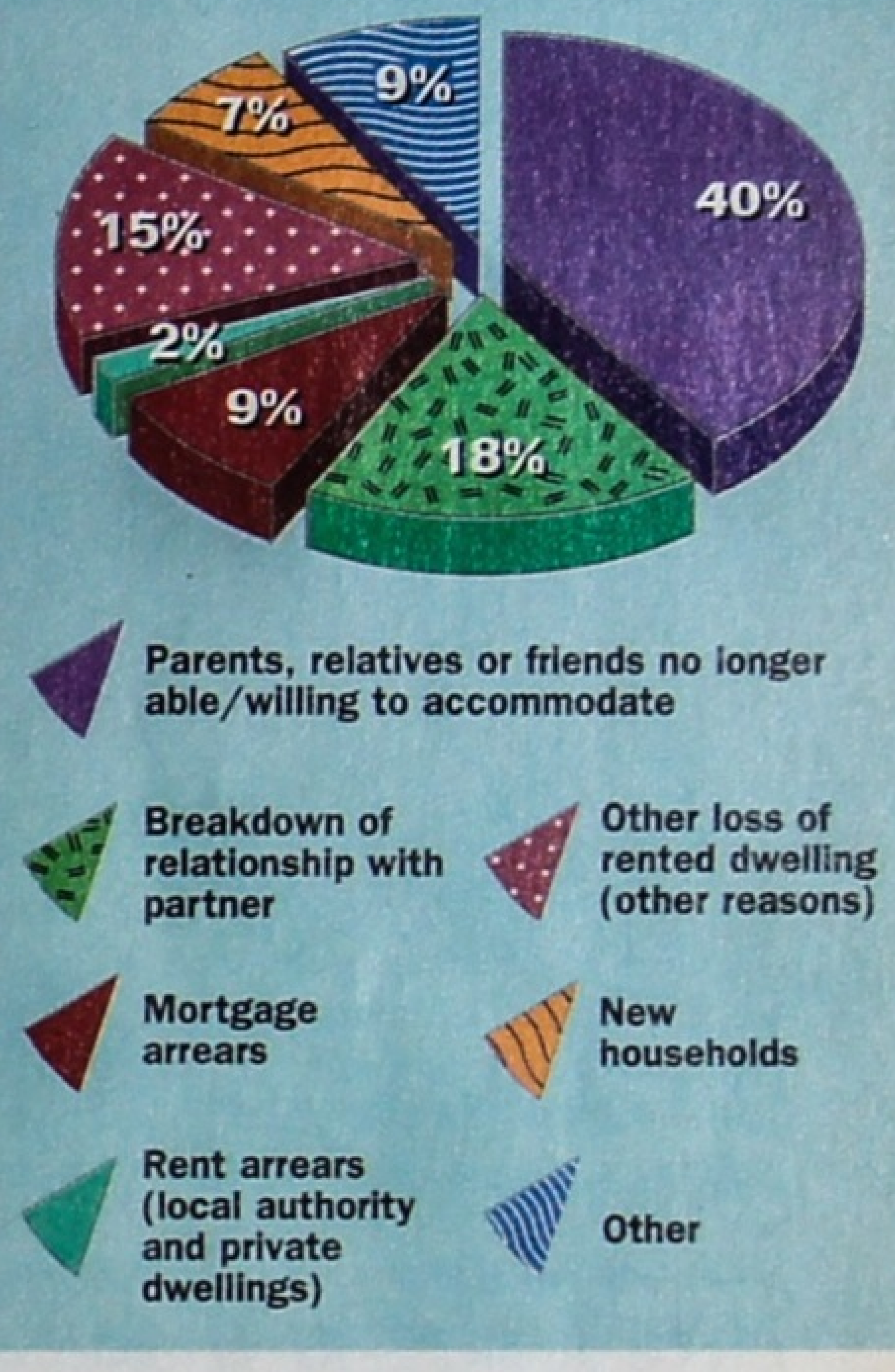
◆ Conditions for poor people in the North are far worse than for the relatively wealthy in the South: infant mortality rates on the Easterhouse housing estate in Glasgow, Scotland (46.7 per 100,000 live births) are more than double those in the São Caetano do Sol region of São Paulo, Brazil (18 per 100,000 live births).[12]

◆ The real numbers of homeless people are very much higher than official statistics suggest; in Britain something like two million people are 'unofficially' homeless or 'hidden', sleeping on friends' floors or in overcrowded conditions.[11]

◆ In the early 1990s around 18 million people within the European Union were homeless or extremely badly housed.[3]

Reasons for Homelessness[11]

Detailed analysis reveals that 40% of those officially homeless in Britain became so because parents, relatives or friends were no longer willing or able to accommodate them.



Megamyths

It is often assumed that millions of people are homeless because they have migrated to the slums of Southern 'megacities'. But such cities still comprise a very small proportion of the total population, both North and South:

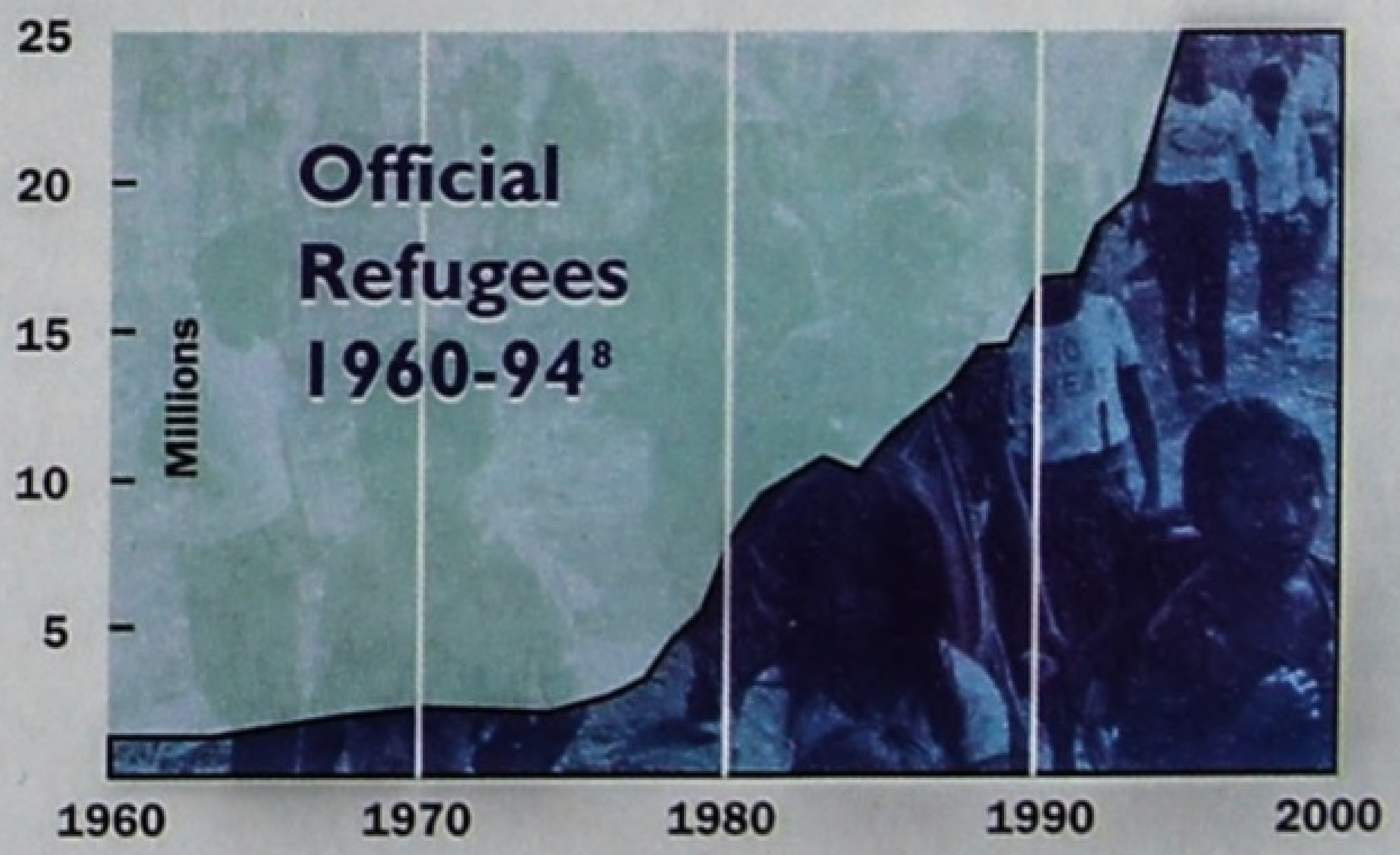
◆ In 1975 Mexico City was projected by the UN to have a population of 31.6 million by the year 2000: in 1994 the projection was reduced to 16.4 million; for Cairo the projections have been reduced from 16.4 million to 10.7 million.

◆ For most of the past 2,000 years the largest cities in the world have always been in Asia and Africa: only briefly during the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth were more than half of the world's 10 biggest cities in Europe and North America.

Refuge

Political repression, war, hunger and environmental degradation force increasing numbers of people to flee their homes.

At the end of 1994 some 23 million people qualified for international assistance as official refugees. Of these nearly three million were from Afghanistan and just over two million from Rwanda. The number of people 'displaced' within their own countries by destitution, war or environmental degradation doubles this figure. An estimated two million people are homeless in the former Yugoslavia.



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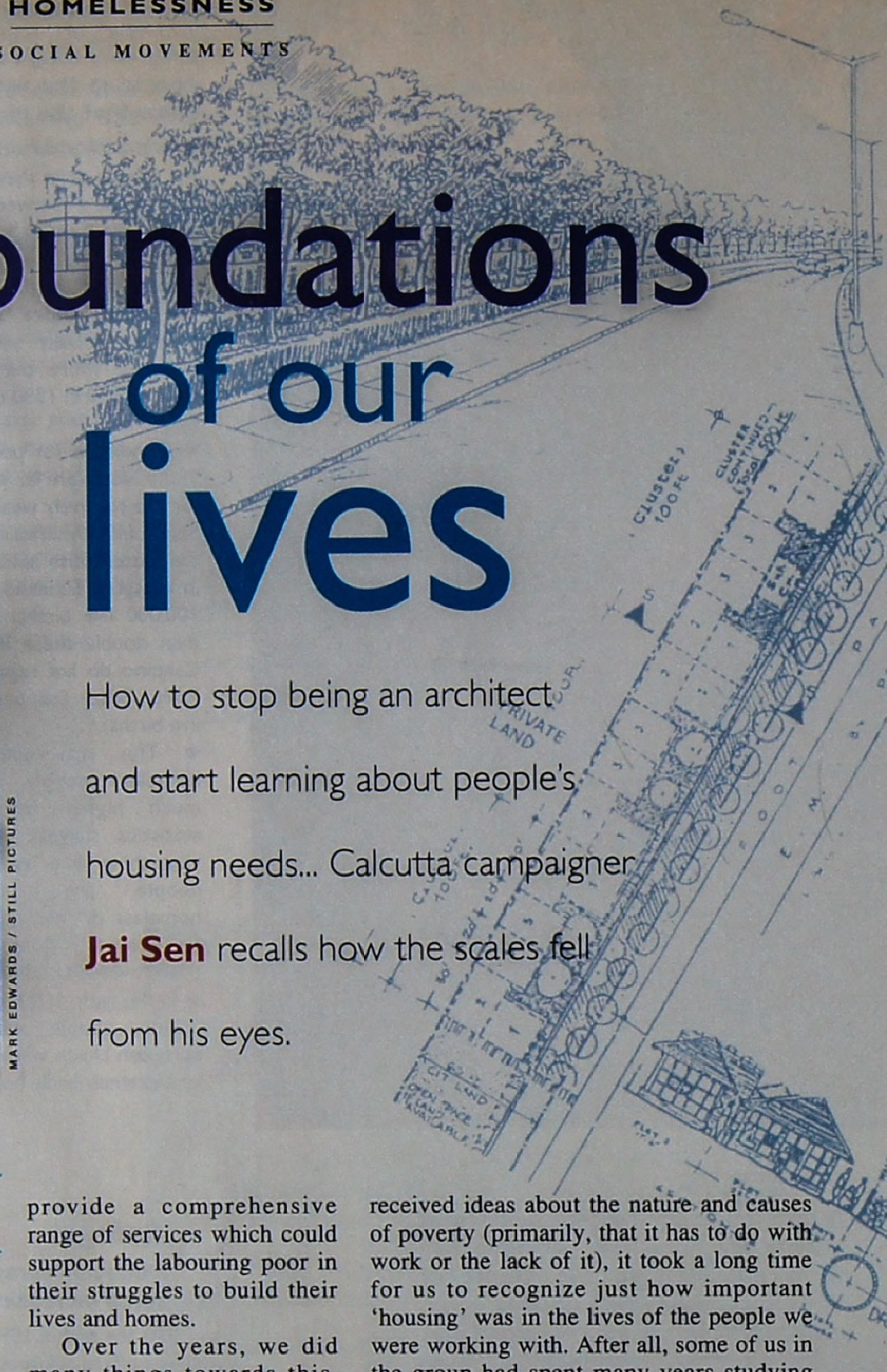
[1] *Our Planet, Our Health*, Report of the WHO Commission on Health and Environment, WHO Geneva, 1992. [2] *UK Housing Condition Survey*, 1991. [3] UNCHS (Habitat), *An Urbanizing World: the Global Report of Human Settlements 1996*, to be published in May by Oxford University Press. [4] The figures represent the average current and future disease burden per person in disability-adjusted life days lost from new cases of the condition in one year (1990). Thus, they include the disability-adjusted life days lost in later years that arose from disease caught in 1990, but do not include days lost in 1990 from disease caught in previous or subsequent years. [5] *The State of the World's Children 1994*, UNICEF. [6] Hamid Tabatabai with Manal Fouad, *The incidence of poverty in developing countries, an ILO compendium of data*, ILO Geneva 1993. [7] Figures from The Joseph Rowntree Trust. [8] Hal Kane, *The Hour of Departure: Forces that Create Refugees and Migrants*, Worldwatch Paper no 125, June 1995. [9] Christopher Jencks, *The Homeless*, Harvard University Press, 1994. [10] Maryann McLaughlin, *Homelessness in Canada: the Report of the National Inquiry*, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, no date. [11] Jill Mann and Alistair Smith, *Who Says There's No Housing Problem?* Shelter, London, second edition, 1993. [12] Figures supplied by David Satterthwaite, IIED, London.

MARK EDWARDS / STILL PICTURES



Foundations of our lives

How to stop being an architect and start learning about people's housing needs... Calcutta campaigner **Jai Sen** recalls how the scales fell from his eyes.

'How could they destroy our homes, our belongings, our lives – and then want to plant trees in their place? Which are more important – trees or people?' ***– Reena Halder, community leader and mother of two, after the demolition of her home in Rabindranagar, Calcutta, on the early morning of Saturday, 18 June 1983.***

THE YEAR 1983 marked a major change in my life as an architect. I was driven by the force of what I experienced – yet another wave of evictions and demolitions in Calcutta, where I live and work – to realize that there was little point in my continuing to be concerned merely with perfecting the design of the foundations of people's houses. I realized that I had to start helping them to build the foundations of their *lives*.

For the ten years prior to that I had worked with communities of the labouring poor in Calcutta – including 'squatters' and 'refugees' from civil and communal strife in Bangladesh – trying to help them improve their housing and living conditions. In 1977, some friends and I had set up an organization to do this work more solidly. Called 'Unnayan' – meaning 'development', in Bengali, though not in the dominant and now-devalued sense, but rather of 'unfolding, self-realization' – our ambition was to provide a comprehensive range of services which could support the labouring poor in their struggles to build their lives and homes.

Over the years, we did many things towards this. Working through community housing and craft organizations, we helped people build self-managed health and schooling services. We documented and researched people's living and working conditions, published reports and undertook public campaigns. And we developed appropriate technologies, in housing (improved techniques for building with bamboo and split plywood), crafts (pedal-driven potters' wheels), and even an improved rickshaw.

We had not understood what a fundamental and formative role housing plays in all our lives

We also engaged in constant and intense reflection to sharpen our understanding of the world around us, of the people we worked with, and of 'poverty' itself.

It seems easy now to say this but, burdened as we were with a whole set of received ideas about the nature and causes of poverty (primarily, that it has to do with work or the lack of it), it took a long time for us to recognize just how important 'housing' was in the lives of the people we were working with. After all, some of us in the group had spent many years studying and then professionally working in the housing field, so we thought we knew something about the subject. But we had not understood what a fundamental and formative role housing plays in all our lives – and perhaps especially for the poor.

Aside from material poverty, insecurity of work and exploitation of labour, one of the most persistent conditions that characterized the lives of *all* the communities we were working with was *dwelling insecurity*.

The first aspect of this was the legal. All those who had been forced to 'squat' somewhere by the lack of other affordable options were vulnerable, exposed to constant exploitation by those with power – *dadas* (local political or gang leaders offering 'protection'), religious/ communal elements, the police, the municipal authorities and so on. We were dismayed, however, to find that this was almost equally true of those who had formal security of tenure. Those who were poor and relatively powerless faced constant pressure to move on from where they lived – pressure from landowners, from real-estate developers, from neighbouring middle-class communities – until they yielded. And as soon as they were forced to move, their lives disintegrated. As we got deeper into our work this reality kept coming back to us – but we were still not able to recognize what we were seeing.

It was a sudden, brutal and city-wide wave of evictions in the city in May-June 1983 which brought us to our senses. What was happening was no accident: *the dehousing of poorer people* – the seizure of their homes and their domestic security – is in itself *a process of relentless impoverishment*. It suddenly came home to us that 'dehousing' is as real and constant a social process as 'housing', and that indeed the two are interlinked.

We also came to understand from the people who faced this insecurity that 'housing' to them was not just their 'hutments' or buildings but a place in the world where they could live in security and dignity. And we suddenly understood the more basic meaning of the Bengali word that is most commonly used by ordinary people in Calcutta for 'housing' – *basustan*, meaning 'a place to settle, to live', as distinct from *abashan*, which is the term that the planners and builders use and means mere buildings or 'housing projects'.

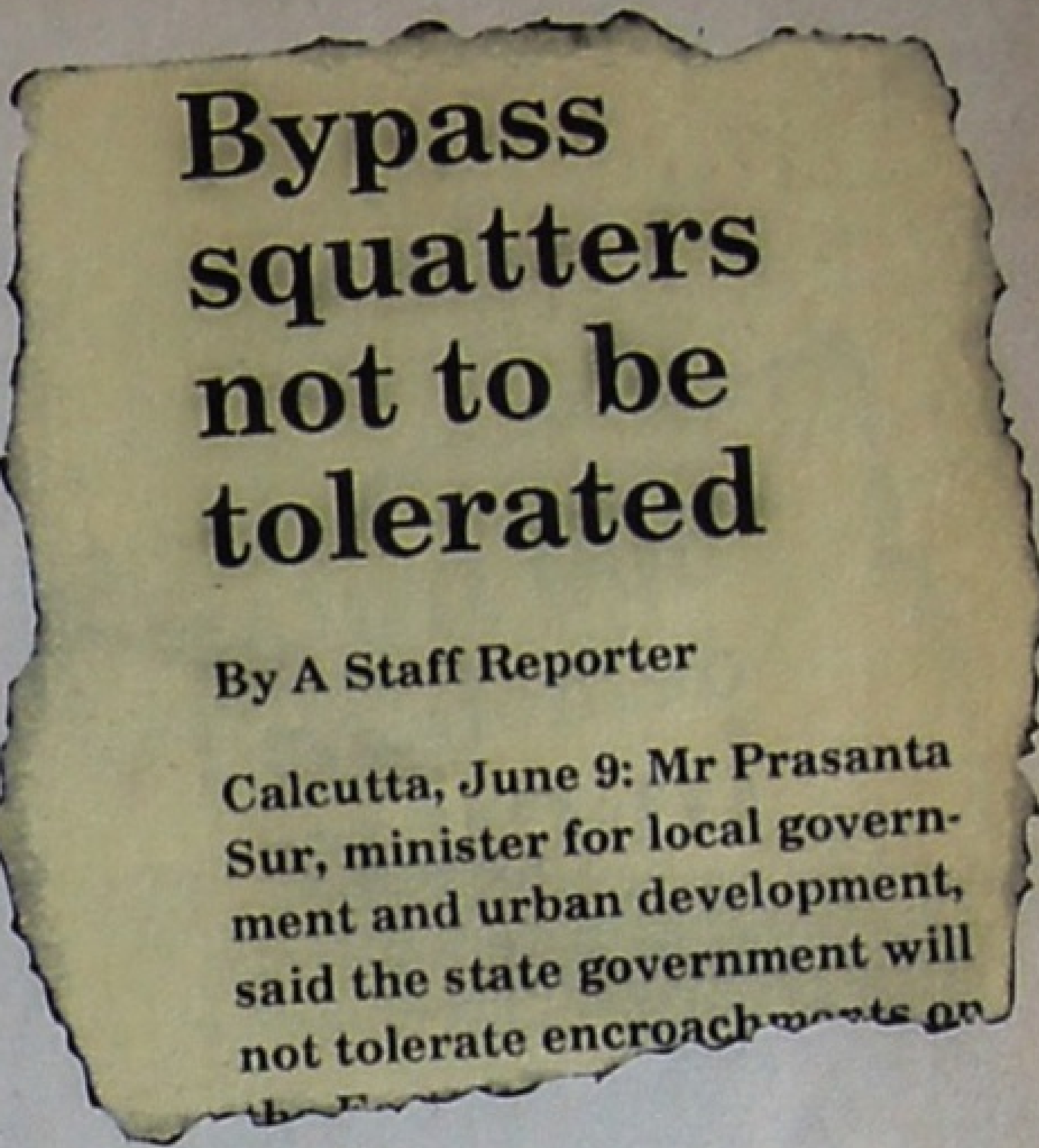
(In English, there is perhaps no easy such alternative term to 'housing'. 'Dwelling' perhaps comes the closest. As John F C Turner and others have pointed out, the word 'housing' has been completely taken over and commodified in the industrialized world, to mean merely the boxes which are constructed and sold. Partly to overcome this idea, they have argued that 'Housing is a verb, not a noun' – like running, or walking. But, despite strenuous efforts to reclaim the word, the dominant sense of 'housing' remains.)

These ideas crystallized through work and discussion with people all over the country. The early 1980s were a time of evictions and demolitions right across urban India: Bangalore, Bhubaneswar, Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, Madras, Nagpur, Surat, and so on. Organizations challenging them came to know of each other and a process of networking started. For some of us, it was a period of intensive travel and contact, and of extraordinary discovery and learning.

The picture that unfolded before our eyes was that people were being dehoused at a rate that perhaps no society in history had ever seen before. It was not merely a physical event, but a process in which people's lives and memories had no place, in which their rights and freedoms were not merely violated but deemed not to exist. Even before they were evicted, people's daily existence was shot through with the violation of their most basic human rights. In urban areas, for example, municipal authorities' standard practice is to deny dwellers in informal settlements drinking water, let alone sanitation, on the grounds that provision of these services would be used to argue their right to live on the land. Dwellers in most such settlements are denied postal services and some are even denied the vote. People are deliberately kept in an insecure, marginalized state.

The evictions and demolitions were accompanied by two other important processes. One, which we came to recognize only when it was almost over, was the passing in 1983-84 in legislatures all over the country of new laws which changed squatting in urban areas from a civil to a criminal offence. Though this may seem only legalistic, the effect of the change was huge: it made criminals of all the millions of people who had to live in such settlements because of social and economic conditions, and thereby subjected them to a wide range of harsh new powers given to the police and municipal authorities. In reality these were India's new pro-landowner Poor Laws.

People were being dehoused at a rate that perhaps no society in history had ever seen before



Bypass squatters not to be tolerated

By A Staff Reporter

Calcutta, June 9: Mr Prasanta Sur, minister for local government and urban development, said the state government will not tolerate encroachments on

The second key phenomenon was the eviction and displacement of huge numbers of people for large projects such as dams and thermal power stations – and even, later on, for military firing ranges and golf courses. This was nothing new.

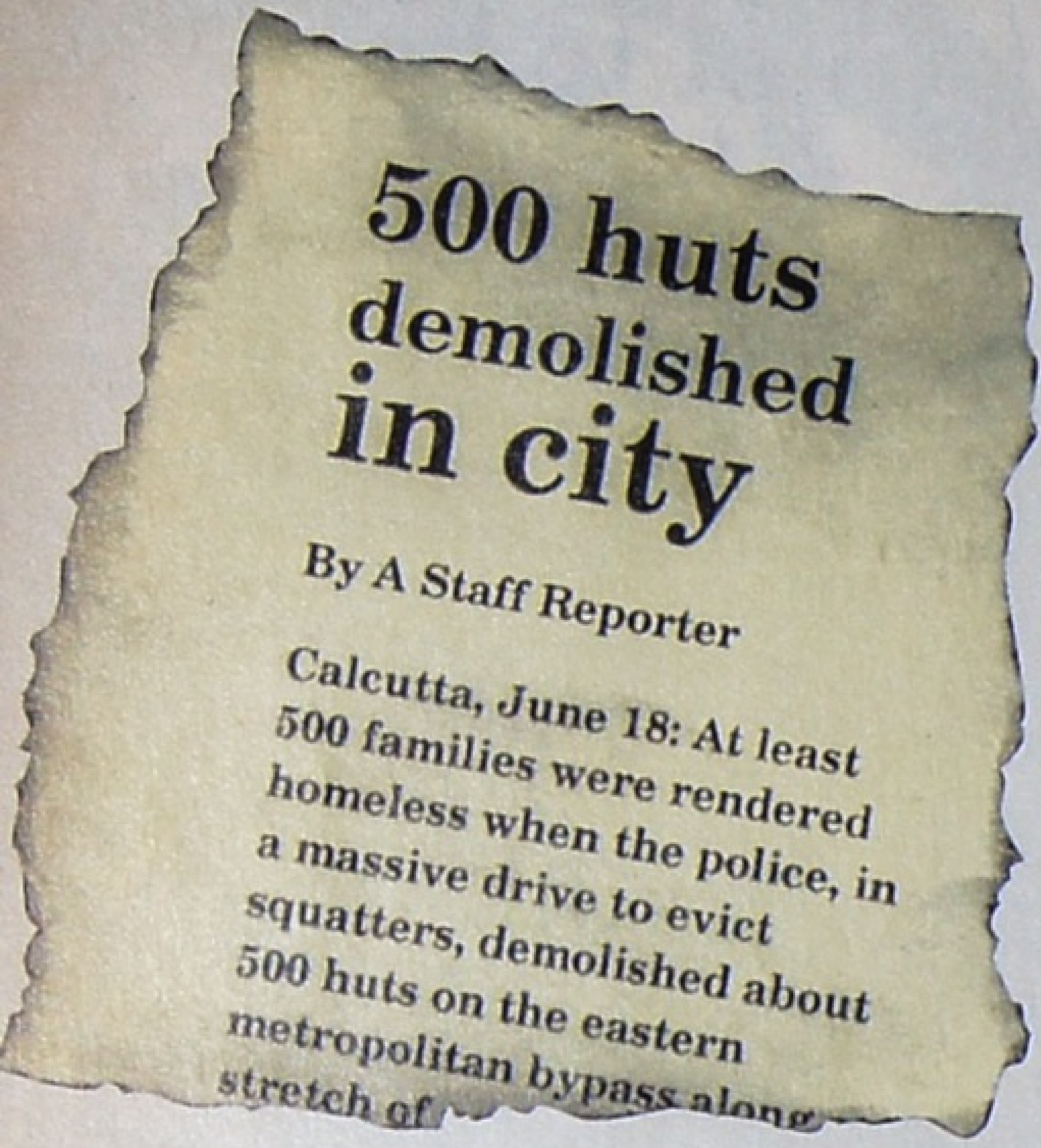
The drive for industrialization and modernization undertaken by India's rulers following independence in 1947 has included massive 'development projects' at its centre, and it is for this reason that India is the world's largest dam builder.

But the scale is vast. The most recent estimate, accepted by government, is that as many as 22-25 million people have been displaced for large projects since independence, in rural areas alone. The vast majority of this number have gained no resettlement, let alone rehabilitation: they have simply been rendered homeless and left to fend for themselves. As is self-evident, these numbers are larger than the population of many whole countries.

In some areas people resisted their displacement, as with the Koel Karo dam in

'Dehousing' as a verb: constant pressure from landowners, developers and middle-class neighbours.

MARK EDWARDS / STILL PICTURES



500 huts demolished in city

By A Staff Reporter

Calcutta, June 18: At least 500 families were rendered homeless when the police, in a massive drive to evict squatters, demolished about 500 huts on the eastern metropolitan bypass along stretch of

south Bihar in the late 1970s and again last year – as well as, more famously, the sustained campaign against the damming of the Narmada River in western India. In most cases people perhaps gave way with less protest. But by the early 1980s, middle-class students, youth and professionals had begun to document and then broadcast these developments. They too started networking.

We equally came to realize that other aspects of 'development' not normally related to housing were destroying people's ability to dwell where they were. The commercialization of agriculture and forests meant that the rural poor lost their customary rights to take thatch and housing timber, lost fodder and grazing areas for their animals; the damming and despoliation of rivers and ponds destroyed their water resources. And it was women who bore the brunt of the new shortages. In the best-known example of this, the women of Garhwal, in the foothills of the Himalayas, were found to be spending ten hours a day collecting firewood where little more than a decade before they had taken only two.

The 'environmental crisis' that we were all becoming aware of by the early 1980s thus had a crucial added dimension: rural people were being relentlessly deprived of the resources they depended upon, undermining their ability to live in security and dignity. Commercialization was unplugging people from the life-systems that they knew and what they were being offered in exchange was the market – the one thing they could not afford.

All the networking, coalition-building and overt resistance around these issues – which emerged from our sense that we had to stop merely defending people and instead start setting the agenda – eventually had an impact nationally. The National Campaign for Housing Rights, for example, had a significant influence on the Indian Government's first national housing policy, finalized in 1992. But it also promoted much more radical ideas: a people's bill of housing rights, which envisaged the formation of dwellers' unions to whom planning powers would be devolved. The Campaign argued that the right to housing should be included in the country's constitution. The idea is not that the State should 'provide' housing for all, but that it has a responsibility to work towards and guarantee the conditions – economic, social, and environmental – under which everyone can live in security and dignity.

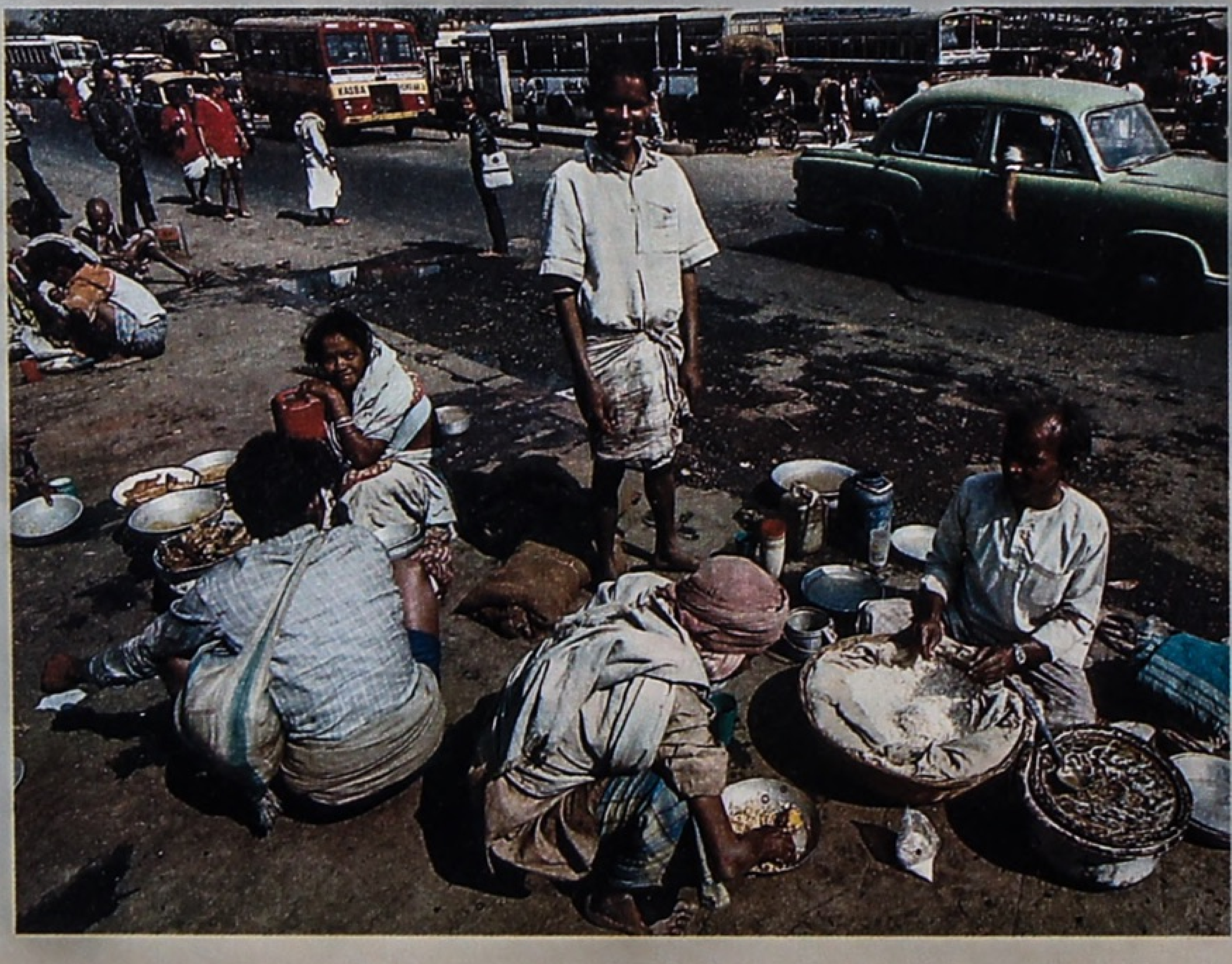
The wide range of groups involved in the work of the Campaign – women's groups, trade unions and lawyers as well as dwellers' organizations – showed the new recognition that housing or dwelling are daily and ongoing struggles over the most basic of all resources. They involve all classes, all communities and also relations between men and women. There are few aspects of our lives that touch so many dimensions.

It is not easy to assess the impact of all this work. The subjects of displacement and rehabilitation have at least now become a matter of wide concern: the Government finally brought out a draft National Rehabilitation Policy during 1994, saying that it was doing so because of the pressure from 'a coalition of people's organizations, activists, the press and the courts'. Equally, most political parties in India – previously unquestioning about 'development' projects – now at least express concern about unjust displacement and environmental questions, and have started including the right to housing in their election manifestos.

The struggles in India seem to have also played something of a role in reshaping the debate about 'housing' at the international level. While the idea of 'housing rights' is not new – it was expressed in, say, Britain in the late 1970s – the ideas have changed radically since that time. In 1987 the Habitat International Coalition took up 'housing rights' in the new, larger sense as one of its central concerns and it is now lobbying at the UN for a Convention to the Right to Adequate Housing. The UN Commission on Human Settlements (Habitat), which for many years during the 1980s steered carefully away from the subject of housing rights, has now even commissioned a paper on the subject for its world conference next year in Istanbul.

Yet at the same time, despite these gains, both the Habitat Conference in Istanbul and the Indian Government's recent consultation on rural housing show that government and voluntary agencies alike still conceive of 'housing' in terms of housing units and projects. The concern remains, at best, with the foundations of houses and not with the foundations of people's lives. This basic battle remains to be won. ■

Jai Sen has taken time out from his community and campaigning work 'to study popular movements in India for a place to live'. For NCHR documents, contact: NCHR Campaign Clearing House, 99/5/6 Ballygunge Place, Calcutta 700 019, India.



Daily dwelling: an ongoing struggle on the streets of Calcutta over the most basic of resources.

NANCY DURRELL-MCKENNA / PANOS PICTURES

Street City

There are posters on the walls and plants in the corners of a warehouse in Toronto – **Murray MacAdam** reports on an extraordinary experiment.

Life at close quarters in Street City: privacy is at a premium but mediation works.

MURRAY MACADAM

AGAINST overwhelming odds, some homeless people manage to exchange life on the streets for a real home.

In Canada's largest city, Toronto, new life is blossoming for several dozen former street people behind the bland exterior of an old downtown warehouse. Everyone has their own room – small and sparsely furnished, but palatial for someone used to sleeping in a room with 20 people in a hostel. And some have found work.

This is 'Street City', a unique residence for 76 men and women willing to tough out the stresses of living at close quarters in exchange for mutual support, secure housing and the chance to get one's life together.

Street City started as a hostel for men in 1988 when the city's real-estate boom wiped out affordable housing for the poor. A popular downtown hostel closed, leaving homeless people with nowhere to go and unwilling to stay in big institutional hostels, widely hated for their violence and prison-like atmosphere.

One of these street people, Jess, made the rounds of hostels and drop-in centres, gathering 5,000 names on a petition against the loss of housing for the poor. Jess and his friends got Toronto's mayor on their side. Their efforts paid off when the city agreed to let them stay in an abandoned warehouse.

But Jess and others, joined by a non-profit housing agency called 'Homes First Society', had a vision that went far beyond the dreary street-and-hostel life in which they seemed trapped. That vision was one of affordable, permanent housing in a mutually supportive setting.

At first it looked like a dream. 'We thought: there's no way any government is going to give a bunch of drunks, guys from the street, $5 million to build housing,' recalls Jess.

Yet the dream took shape as 'Homes First' gained government funding, while the men set to work with hammers and tools to transform the lower floor of the warehouse into simple accommodation.

Today Street City houses an equal number of men and women, in separate 'houses' of 12 people each, all within the sprawling confines of the former warehouse. Residents, most living on social assistance, pay an average $325 a month rent. That's a big bite out of monthly income of only $520. But it's less than the going rate for a single room in Toronto where, as one resident says: 'You could die and no-one would know it.'

Despite posters on the walls and plants in the corners, Street City still resembles a warehouse. Yet it hums with life. Residents stroll along its 'Main Street', nodding to each other and relaxing in battered easy chairs.

'I love it here,' says Mark, a gaunt man pushing his wheelchair along Main Street, still bitter about his life in a mental institution for 30 years. 'I had too many people ordering me what to do. Now I got lots of friends. I don't bother nobody and nobody bothers me. I got my own life.'

Street City is home to many 'psychiatric survivors' like Mark, and others left on the margins of mainstream society, such as long-time homeless people and chronic alcoholics. Staff and residents readily admit that alcohol and crack cocaine are problems. But living in a place where differences are accepted and help is available has enabled some residents to overcome their addictions.

Bill came to Street City planning to stay for two weeks. 'I fell in love with the place,' he says, and was soon elected 'mayor' of the community. He spends hours talking to people, listening to their gripes and working to resolve problems. Life in this unique community can be difficult, he admits: 'We've had some pretty wild times.' But, he believes there is a sense of caring that more than makes up for the difficulties.

Working out the tensions of life at close quarters is made smoother by the community's mediation process. Privacy is at a premium and conflicts are frequent. Disputes, often involving noise or men bothering women, are brought before a group that includes a member of staff and someone from outside. The group tries to show how the behaviour involved is wrong. In most cases mediation works, although some people are evicted.

Shared decision-making is another key ingredient. All major issues are brought before the community's 'town council' where everyone can make their voice heard.

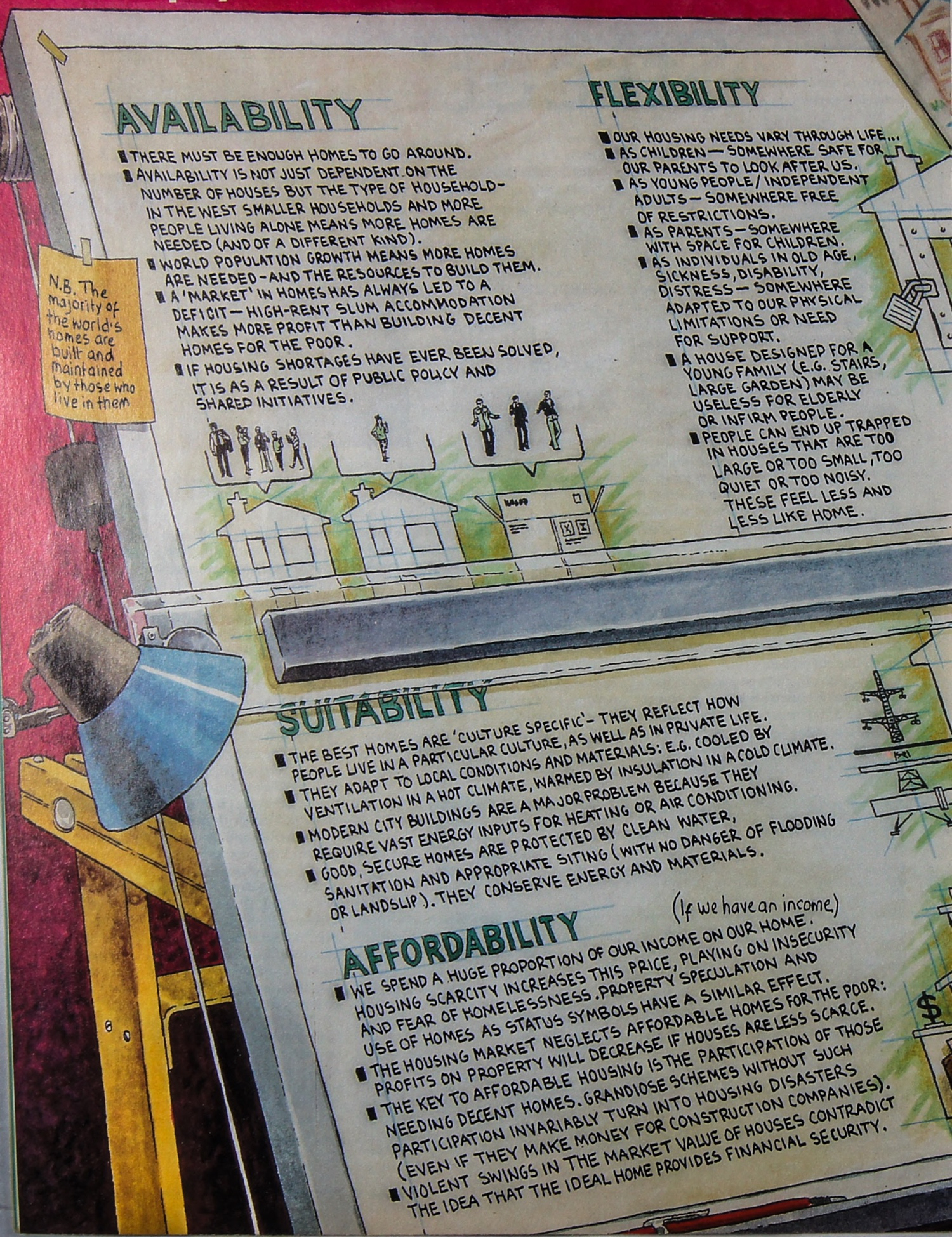
Another focus is work. Street City's bank, canteen, maintenance crew and other businesses employ twelve residents part-time, while another five are involved in building another housing project for people on low-income.

Living in what is basically a commune is something most Canadians would prefer to avoid. But community and self-help provide the residents of Street City with a quality of life many can't find elsewhere – as well as offering a lesson for society on how homeless people can solve their own problems with modest public support.

'This is a small model of how we as a society should function,' says member of staff Krista Ellis. Ironically, Ontario's new right-wing government recently killed its support for non-profit housing, making it almost impossible for any more Street City-style housing to be developed. ■

Murray MacAdam is a freelance journalist working in Toronto.

Simply... The Ideal Home



AVAILABILITY

- THERE MUST BE ENOUGH HOMES TO GO AROUND.
- AVAILABILITY IS NOT JUST DEPENDENT ON THE NUMBER OF HOUSES BUT THE TYPE OF HOUSEHOLD- IN THE WEST SMALLER HOUSEHOLDS AND MORE PEOPLE LIVING ALONE MEANS MORE HOMES ARE NEEDED (AND OF A DIFFERENT KIND).
- WORLD POPULATION GROWTH MEANS MORE HOMES ARE NEEDED - AND THE RESOURCES TO BUILD THEM.
- A 'MARKET' IN HOMES HAS ALWAYS LED TO A DEFICIT — HIGH-RENT SLUM ACCOMMODATION MAKES MORE PROFIT THAN BUILDING DECENT HOMES FOR THE POOR.
- IF HOUSING SHORTAGES HAVE EVER BEEN SOLVED, IT IS AS A RESULT OF PUBLIC POLICY AND SHARED INITIATIVES.

N.B. The majority of the world's homes are built and maintained by those who live in them

FLEXIBILITY

- OUR HOUSING NEEDS VARY THROUGH LIFE...
- AS CHILDREN — SOMEWHERE SAFE FOR OUR PARENTS TO LOOK AFTER US.
- AS YOUNG PEOPLE / INDEPENDENT ADULTS — SOMEWHERE FREE OF RESTRICTIONS.
- AS PARENTS — SOMEWHERE WITH SPACE FOR CHILDREN.
- AS INDIVIDUALS IN OLD AGE, SICKNESS, DISABILITY, DISTRESS — SOMEWHERE ADAPTED TO OUR PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS OR NEED FOR SUPPORT.
- A HOUSE DESIGNED FOR A YOUNG FAMILY (E.G. STAIRS, LARGE GARDEN) MAY BE USELESS FOR ELDERLY OR INFIRM PEOPLE.
- PEOPLE CAN END UP TRAPPED IN HOUSES THAT ARE TOO LARGE OR TOO SMALL, TOO QUIET OR TOO NOISY. THESE FEEL LESS AND LESS LIKE HOME.

SUITABILITY

- THE BEST HOMES ARE 'CULTURE SPECIFIC'- THEY REFLECT HOW PEOPLE LIVE IN A PARTICULAR CULTURE, AS WELL AS IN PRIVATE LIFE.
- THEY ADAPT TO LOCAL CONDITIONS AND MATERIALS: E.G. COOLED BY VENTILATION IN A HOT CLIMATE, WARMED BY INSULATION IN A COLD CLIMATE.
- MODERN CITY BUILDINGS ARE A MAJOR PROBLEM BECAUSE THEY REQUIRE VAST ENERGY INPUTS FOR HEATING OR AIR CONDITIONING.
- GOOD, SECURE HOMES ARE PROTECTED BY CLEAN WATER, SANITATION AND APPROPRIATE SITING (WITH NO DANGER OF FLOODING OR LANDSLIP). THEY CONSERVE ENERGY AND MATERIALS.

AFFORDABILITY

(If we have an income)

- WE SPEND A HUGE PROPORTION OF OUR INCOME ON OUR HOME. HOUSING SCARCITY INCREASES THIS PRICE, PLAYING ON INSECURITY AND FEAR OF HOMELESSNESS. PROPERTY SPECULATION AND USE OF HOMES AS STATUS SYMBOLS HAVE A SIMILAR EFFECT.
- THE HOUSING MARKET NEGLECTS AFFORDABLE HOMES FOR THE POOR: PROFITS ON PROPERTY WILL DECREASE IF HOUSES ARE LESS SCARCE.
- THE KEY TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS THE PARTICIPATION OF THOSE NEEDING DECENT HOMES. GRANDIOSE SCHEMES WITHOUT SUCH PARTICIPATION INVARIABLY TURN INTO HOUSING DISASTERS (EVEN IF THEY MAKE MONEY FOR CONSTRUCTION COMPANIES).
- VIOLENT SWINGS IN THE MARKET VALUE OF HOUSES CONTRADICT THE IDEA THAT THE IDEAL HOME PROVIDES FINANCIAL SECURITY.

For consumer societies the ideal home is the ultimate buy, a private shelter from the outside world, packaged with gadgets and comforts supplied by industries that spend a fortune peddling a fantasy. But this 'ideal' creates more problems than it solves in an outside world that won't go away. In the South, some innovative housing projects for homeless people have started a thoughtful process by asking themselves what their ideal home would be like. The NI goes back to the drawing board to set out some of the basic principles on which decent homes have to be built.

ACCESSIBILITY

- A HOUSE THAT IS DISTANT FROM WORK, SCHOOLS, HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE NETWORKS, IS NO HOME AT ALL. MORE TIME IS SPENT TRAVELLING THAN AT HOME.
- CAR-BASED SOCIETIES THAT NEGLECT PUBLIC TRANSPORT LEAVE THE CARLESS (OFTEN A VULNERABLE GROUP ANYWAY) LOCKED IN THEIR HOUSES.
- DEREGULATED ECONOMIES DEMAND THAT PEOPLE MOVE TO WHERE THERE IS WORK. THIS KILLS COMMUNITIES AND PROMOTES MIGRATION TO CITIES THAT LACK HOUSING ALREADY.
- IN EXTREME CASES, PEOPLE ARE PUT IN INSTITUTIONS CALLED 'HOMES'.
- THERE IS NO SIGN YET THAT THE 'INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY' WILL REVERSE THIS TREND BY TURNING HOMES INTO WORKPLACES. IF IT DID THERE WOULD BE THE PROBLEM OF HOMES 'INVADED' BY WORK FROM WHICH THERE IS NO ESCAPE.

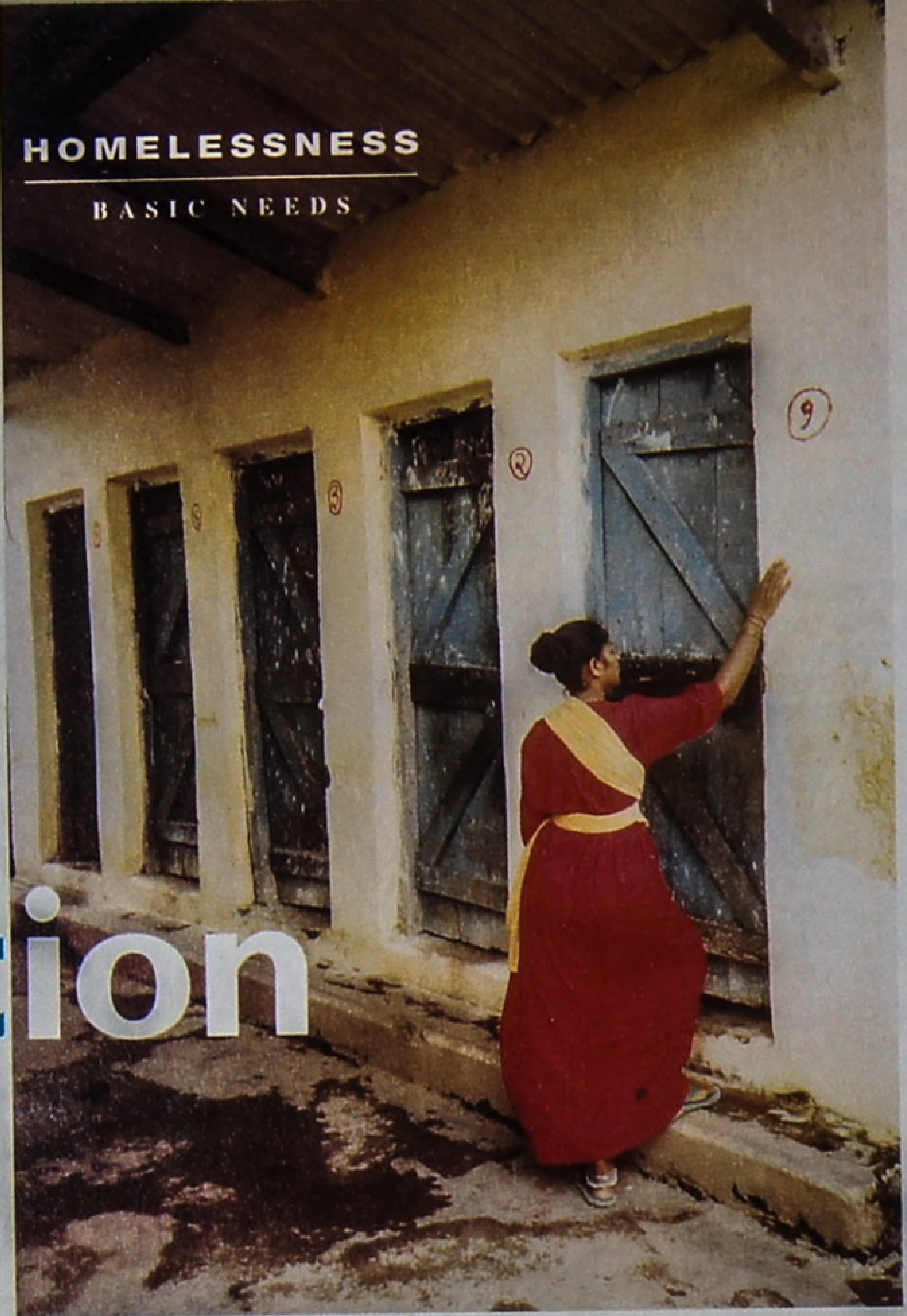
Inflexible housing means we adapt our lives to a building, and not vice versa.

RESPONSIBILITY

- THE BEST HOUSING IS CREATED BY COMMUNITIES AND REFLECTS THEIR PARTICIPATION. MASS HOUSING – WHETHER BY GOVERNMENTS OR PRIVATE DEVELOPERS – RARELY ACHIEVES THIS. BOTH TEND TO RESULT IN GHETTOS – PUBLIC SPACES SHROUDED IN FEAR OR PRIVATE HOMES AS 'SECURE' BUNKERS.
- COMMUNITIES THAT TAKE RESPONSIBILITY INTO THEIR OWN HANDS OR BUILD 'INFORMAL' HOMES FOR THEMSELVES OFTEN FACE OFFICIAL HOSTILITY, INADEQUATE CAPITAL FINANCE AND NO ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES.
- MAKING HOUSING AND LIVING CONDITIONS AN URGENT PUBLIC PRIORITY WOULD IMPROVE HEALTH STANDARDS MORE THAN ANY OTHER SINGLE FACTOR.

ILLUSTRATION: P J POLYP

Sense and sanitation



COURTESY OF SHEELA PATEL

Workable solutions: hard-earned experience finds its way into the design of new toilet blocks.

To create a home you must start with the basics. **Sheela Patel** reports on 'pavement people' who refuse to be walked over and are getting involved.

BOMBAY is the financial capital of India with some of the highest property values in the world. Half of its ten million people pay incredible prices for homes. The other half live in informal settlements; more than a million of them on pavements in makeshift structures of bamboo, plastic, cloth, wood and tin. These people pay a high price too, though the currency they hand over is not rupees but their own health, living as they often do without water or sanitation of any kind.

Yet the Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) is ambivalent: 'We can't give toilets to slum dwellers; this will encourage people to migrate to the city!' they say, or: 'The slums along the highway should have sanitation so foreign visitors don't have to see this embarrassing sight of squatting people with umbrellas along the road.' As if people were flocking to Bombay to enjoy the luxury of public toilet blocks, or the psychological comfort of tourists should be the primary motivation of municipal sanitation programmes!

Or else they say: 'Don't the poor deserve the same as everyone else – an individual toilet?' or: 'Since poor communities don't maintain public toilets, let's give them toilets in their own home so they will be forced to keep things clean.'

Everyone, it seems, has an opinion about how to solve the problem of sanitation in informal settlements. But what do the residents who live there, the people on the footpaths and in the slums, believe is a workable solution?

In 1984, I and 12 other people formed the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC). We sought to create an organization which would make space for poor communities to focus on issues which concern them, to understand why they face certain problems and then to reflect on the solutions. Over the last ten years, through our alliance with Mahila Milan – a national network of women's collectives – and the National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF), we have used this approach to address many issues, including land tenure, shelter, employment and credit.

Everyone has an opinion about how to solve the problem... But what do the residents believe?

The way women living on pavements in the Byculla area of Bombay formulated their opinion on toilets illustrates our approach. We visited slums both with and without public toilets, and the few government-constructed tenement blocks in which each dwelling has an individual toilet. Through these site visits and numerous discussions the women arrived at an assessment of the status quo.

Less than half of Bombay is linked to sewers. In most slums the residents either defecate in the open or – in the few locations where they exist – use community latrines. Municipal maintenance is infrequent and poor, and the number of users per toilet is far too high. The toilets are dirty, uncared-for, overflowing and often unusable.

In slums without toilets people created makeshift arrangements which emphasized privacy, but not the disposal of faeces. In slums with toilets the number of users could be as high as 500 people per seat. Little children never got a chance to use the facilities when adult men were lined up waiting. In the government-constructed, multi-storey tenements, women were very unhappy to have an individual toilet inside their homes. In all the areas visited women had taken the drastic step of blocking it up. Many slums have low water pressure; toilets begin to stink, and since the tenement is only one room a dirty toilet next to the cooking area presents a serious health hazard. 'If we have to cope with a dirty toilet,' the women said, 'it is better that it is outside the house – we have other uses for that space'.

Having completed the rounds of other informal settlements, SPARC, Mahila

Milan and NSDF began to develop their own views. They agreed a preference for community toilets with a ratio of one toilet for every 25 people – a toilet block of four or five seats could be shared by 20-25 households who would jointly manage them. The blocks would include separate seats for men and women, an outside open channel over which the children could squat and a flushing mechanism which would draw their waste into the main collection pit.

When we enter into dialogue with the authorities this is now the basic formula we present to them as the people's solution. It is not perfect. It is not ideal. And it is not permanent. But it represents a pragmatic solution which will make basic sanitation available to all the poor people in the city and establish a partnership between city authorities and communities.

The collective, hard-earned experience of SPARC, Mahila Milan and NSDF suggests that proactive dialogue must be properly prepared for by the participants. Each group must make a substantial investment so that it can come to the negotiating table with a clear sense of what is important to them and what is not, what contribution they can make towards the solution and what concessions would be acceptable.

In 1989-90 we surveyed slums in ten cities. We helped local city federations identify a core team of community leaders (men and women) who visited all their informal settlements. Almost invariably sanitation was identified as one of the most persistent and serious problems they faced. For example, in Kanpur, a city in the state of Uttar Pradesh in the north of India, the slum dwellers surveyed their area and found they needed 500 toilets. They suggested that municipal officials study their proposal and, if it were acceptable, construct a number of toilet blocks which the communities would then maintain.

We began training slum dwellers in other cities to organize themselves and to enter into dialogue with the municipal administrations. We also ensured that federations were able to visit each other's settlements to gain ideas and confidence. These types of support provided both capacity-building experience and tangible evidence – assets which helped their participation in the city's decision-making process.

We are now participating in a project in Bombay which will provide 20,000 toilet seats for one million people living in the city's slums. According to our data collection there are at present just 3,000 toilet seats for these people; 80 per cent of the toilets are not fully operational and need to be torn down or repaired. Negotiations to explore how communities can be assisted to take on construction, maintenance and management of toilets are in progress.

We and the communities with which we work have come a long way in the ten years since women pavement dwellers first began to discuss the problem of toilets in their ideal settlement. As more and more communities, women and city officials co-operate they become more capable of refining the solution, adding new dimensions and adapting to different contexts. This improves the material condition of people living in informal urban settlements. But, more importantly, it is a process of empowerment and involvement. Once people start talking about toilets other things follow. ■

Mahila Milan is the name a group of women pavement dwellers from the Byculla area of Bombay gave to themselves in 1986. As these women began to share their views and ideas with women in other settlements, additional groups gathered together and adopted the same name. Now this network of collectives extends to 14 cities. Its main focus is to train women to participate centrally in community decision-making.

The National Slum Dwellers Federation started in 1974. It sought an alliance with SPARC in 1986 and has actively supported the development of Mahila Milan's network. NSDF was originally 100-per-cent male; today 50 per cent of its committee members are women trained by Mahila Milan.

SPARC, Mahila Milan and NSDF believe in the following problem-solving process:

- Start with the poorest, worst-off group. If a solution can be made to work for them, then it can be adapted to work for the better off.
- Those whose lives are affected are the best judges. They may not contribute all the elements, but they can identify the essential ingredients.
- Women remain the managers of communities at the daily level, yet when outside agencies come in, women are often sidelined as male leaders take over. Ensuring that women's collectives participate in the entire process is crucial for the development and sustainability of a workable solution.

A high price for a home: paid in the currency of the pavement people's health, destroyed by living without water or sanitation.

JEFF SPEED

Sheela Patel is one of the founders and the current director of SPARC, which has available a number of publications about its work. Write to PO Box 9389, Bombay 400 026, India.

THE BIG ISSUE
Coming up from the streets
Ian Hart
glory boy
VENDOR
L855

Pat: 'You can hold your head high and know you are doing it yourself.'

GIDEON MANDEL / NETWORK

World exclusive!

Homeless people are making their presence felt on city streets in a new and challenging way. **Tessa Swithinbank** tells the unique success story of *The Big Issue* in Britain and of 'street papers' around the world.

PAT IS ADAMANT. 'If it hadn't been for *The Big Issue* my only other choice when I first became homeless would have been to beg or become a prostitute. It has changed my life radically,' she adds, 'given me back my confidence'.

Outside shops, theatres, cinemas and malls, in hundreds of towns and cities throughout Europe and North America, and in South Africa, marginalized people are selling street papers. They are earning a living without having to beg.

Pat, aged 40, sells the weekly *Big Issue* in a craft market in Merton, a suburb of London. Her story is typical of many who become homeless in the First World. The causes are myriad: losing your job; losing your home through not being able to pay rent or the mortgage; divorce, with one partner not being able to afford alternative accommodation; abuse at home.

Pat's two teenage daughters and son were sexually and physically abused by her partner. One day she decided to leave home and, with only a carrier bag in her hand, told him she was going out shopping. She ended up living on the streets and in 'bed-and-breakfasts' with her children.

Determined to move off the streets, Pat sold *The Big Issue* for 12 hours a day and earned enough money to buy food and clothes, even saving a little. 'I met my present partner through *The Big Issue*,' she says. 'He was a vendor on the Strand. We met at *The Big Issue* office and have now built our home together.'

So how does the paper work? The principle is simple. A person is allocated a selling pitch and given a badge. Then they buy copies of the paper for 30p (50 cents) – getting the first ten copies on credit if necessary – and sell each one to the public for 70p, keeping 40p for themselves.

Profits from the business go to its social-support system for people who have often been excluded from society for many years. Drug and alcohol counselling is available, while staff in the housing unit obtain either short-term or long-term accommodation for homeless people, most of whom are single men in their 20s and 30s. 'Micro-enterprises', such as candle-making and a unit training people in desk-top publishing and computer skills, put them in a better position to get back into the job market.

The training and support are absolutely crucial, believes Pat. 'A roof over your head is not enough. Homelessness is not just a situation, it is a state of mind. To rejoin society a homeless person needs help.'

Nobody likes to see people wrapped in blankets and huddling in doorways. But there is a general feeling of powerlessness. What *The Big Issue* has done since its launch in September 1991 challenges society's perception of homelessness. A quarter of a million people talk to the vendors every week about why they are on the streets. 'I always buy my *Big Issue* from Andy outside Waterloo Station,' says one commuter who travels to London from Surrey every day. 'Now I know more about his life I don't feel so critical. I really admire his determination to get back on his feet.'

Why does the paper have so much public support? Well, it's a good read. 'Exclusives' with celebrities, musicians and artists combine with news and features on issues not tackled elsewhere. The 'Street Lights' section is for homeless people and their writing – the paper also campaigns for their rights. It's a way, too, for individuals to feel they are making a difference – the public responds well to a positive example. Together with its sister papers in Scotland and Ireland, it now has combined sales of nearly one million a month. Its high profile means that it is talked about on the radio, on television, in the papers and even scripted into soap operas.

The street-paper phenomenon has mushroomed worldwide. You can now buy almost 60 different titles in 12 European countries. Travelling around Germany, for example, you will find at least 25 street papers with such colourful names as *Hinz & Kunzt* (Hamburg), *Asphalt* (Hannover), *Bodo* (Dortmund), *Motz & Co* (Berlin), *Biss* (Munich) and *Kippe* (Leipzig).

The papers work with a variety of marginalized groups – unemployed, drug addicts or refugees, as well as homeless people. They sell anywhere between 3,000 and 120,000 copies a month. There is a

TagesSatz
DAS ERSTE STRASSENMAGAZIN VON KASSEL BIS GÖTTINGEN
THE BIG ISSUE
BIG ISSUES
£1
THE BIG ISSUE IN SCOTLAND
Helping the homeless help themselves
STREET
НА ДНЕ
NEMO N°5 Journal
Dossier La femme
HOMELESS TALK
HELPING THE HOMELESS HELP THEMSELVES
FEATURES:
WRITER'S WORKSHOP
WHEN DID YOU LAST LAUGH?
CATCH UP WITH THE HOMELESS
LE MAGAZINE CONTRE L'EXCLUSION 15F DONT 7,80F POUR LE VENDEUR
La Rue
SONDAGE CSA/LA RUE/FNARS : Un Français sur deux craint de devenir un exclu
L'INVITÉE : Jane Birkin, changer le monde, tout simplement.
LE DOSSIER : Travail précaire, l'insécurité partagée

wide diversity of approach to both editorial content and the support of vendors. Some papers only provide an income, but the majority make a much broader response to the needs of their vendors.

In Eastern Europe homelessness has increased steadily since the demise of communism, with higher rents, property scams and unemployment. Welfare systems and safety nets have disappeared. In St Petersburg, Russia, the problem is at its most acute. Over 50,000 *bomzhi* (people with no fixed address), including thousands of children, are sleeping under bridges, in stairwells and on the streets.

At the Nochlyezhka project 24 dedicated staff work with 13,000 homeless people every year who come through the doors needing food and medical care. Director Valeriy Sokolov was inspired by a copy of *The Big Issue* brought to the shelter in 1992 and raised money to launch Eastern Europe's first street paper in September 1994. Aptly named *The Depths* after Maxim Gorky's low-life novel, the paper is the only way that homeless people can earn a legal wage. Without a resident's stamp, which gives every Russian citizen's official address, they have no civil rights or access to health and education, leaving them totally outside the system.

The Depths covers issues from human-rights abuse to off-beat culture. Increasingly popular, the monthly print-run of 12,000 is often sold out within days of publication. Sokolov believes the paper is changing society's attitude to homeless people in a country where, under communism, it was a criminal offence to be homeless. 'The state must see a ragged, flea-ridden, foul-smelling person not as an anti-social element but as its own citizen, whose rights and liberty are incontrovertible,' he says.

New York is the home of the world's first street paper, *Street News*, which was the inspiration for *The Big Issue*. Street papers are now sold in North American cities from coast to coast. Paul Cohen is editor of *Street Scene* in Los Angeles, the only street paper for youth in the US. 'We work with runaway youth who are still coming to Los Angeles searching for the Hollywood Dream,' he explains. He knows their lives can easily become sordid and difficult. Involving them in writing *Street Scene* is good both for them and for the readers. 'The paper allows them the opportunity to be creative,' says Cohen; most American and Canadian papers focus heavily on the involvement of homeless writers.

The first street paper in the South has been launched in South Africa. *Homeless Talk* started two years ago as an initiative of the Central Johannesburg Partnership and other church groups. Each edition is compiled by a weekly writing group attended by about 30 homeless people. Vendors buy the paper for 20 cents and sell it for one rand.

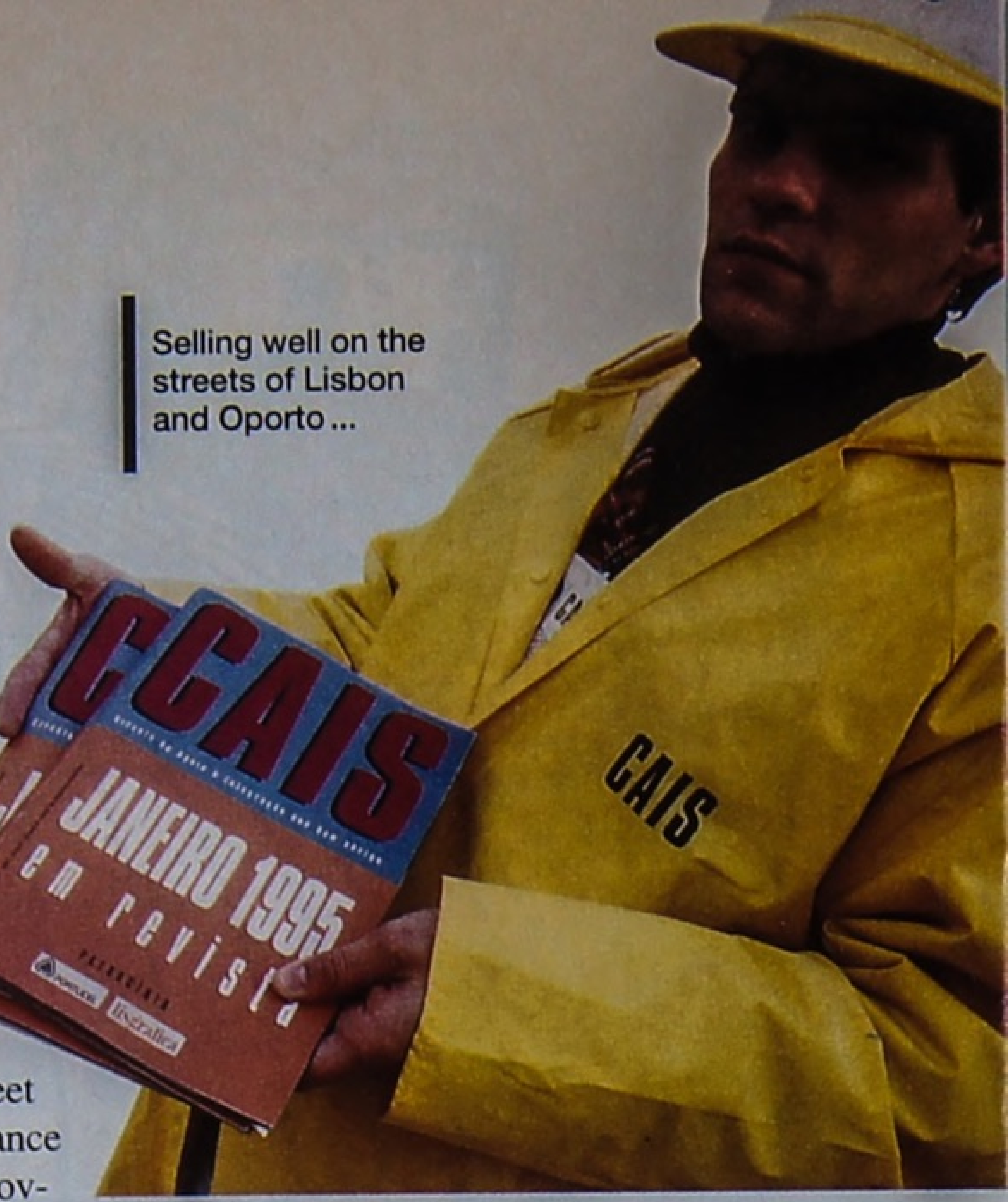
The Big Issue's Maria Clancy visited *Homeless Talk* last year to share ideas and experiences with the staff and vendors. In a country where housing is high on the political agenda she believes *Homeless Talk* is a dynamic and creative force: 'One female vendor told me: "My shack was washed away in the recent rains. My three children and I now live with our neighbours." *Homeless Talk* has been her lifeline. "The paper has given me the means to buy what I need to rebuild my life," she told me.'

Many of the vendors are drawn from the hundreds of homeless residents of the Park bus and rail station in Johannesburg. 'I was talking to Michael, who used to live in Park Station,' says Maria. 'He was elated because he is now able to rent a flat through his earnings from *Homeless Talk*. He was very positive about his future.' Plans are now underway for street papers to be set up in Durban and Cape Town.

This month Australia's first paper hits the streets of Melbourne. In Eastern Europe more will follow, notably in Budapest and Warsaw. There are sure to be further launches elsewhere.

Street papers won't solve the problem of homelessness on their own. Getting homeless people out of the street, and getting the street out of homeless people, needs an alliance of homeless people with the public, government and the voluntary sector.

But street papers *are* giving marginalized people the chance to bring about change through their own action. Pat is in no doubt about what *The Big Issue* has done for her: 'You are not a prisoner of the system any more, not caught in the poverty trap. You can hold your head high and know that you are doing it yourself.' ■



Selling well on the streets of Lisbon and Oporto...

Tessa Swithinbank works on international coverage for *The Big Issue*, London.

ACTION

INTERNATIONAL

International Network of Street Papers
Run from *The Big Issue* offices in London, INSP is a network which unites its 19 European members around a street-paper charter. The core philosophy of the charter is that all post-investment profits generated by the papers should be used to provide social support for the vendors and not for individual gain. INSP links European street papers with their counterparts in South Africa, Canada, the US and Australia as well as providing a consultancy service for its partner papers and advising on the setting up of new street papers and support initiatives for marginalized people.
INSP, The Big Issue, Fleet House, 57-61 Clerkenwell Road, London EC1M 5NP, UK, tel: 44 171 418 0418, fax: 44 171 418 0428.

Habitat International Coalition/Women & Shelter – Habitat II Secretariat
Co-ordinates the non-governmental organization (NGO) preparations for the UN's Habitat II conference – 'The City Summit' – in Istanbul in June. Circulates *People Towards Habitat II* newsletter.
c/o Rooftops Canada, 2 Berkeley Street, Suite 207, Toronto Ontario, Canada M5A 2W3,
tel: 1 416 366 1445, fax: 1 416 366 3876,
e-mail: rooftops@web.apc.org

Homeless International
Primarily concerned with projects for homeless people in the South.
Homeless International, Guildford House, 20 Queens Road, Coventry CV1 3EG, tel: 44 1203 632802, fax: 44 1203 632911.

Home on the Internet
Bruce Harris' Casa Alianza has a home page on the Internet which gives plenty of background to their work with street children.
http://magi.com/crica/casalnza.html

Society for Community Organization
Human-rights group active in the run-up to the Chinese take-over in 1997 and dealing with a range of issues, including the activities of the Hong Kong police, as well as homelessness.
SoCo, 52 Princess Margaret Road, 3/Fl, Homantin, Kln, Hong Kong, tel: 852 713 9165.

Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions
Particularly interested in international law and conventions.
COHRE, Havikstraat 38 bis, 3514 TR Utrecht, Netherlands, tel: 31 30 73 19 76, fax: 31 30 72 14 53.

AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND

Tenants Protection Association
187 Cashel Street, Christchurch, tel: (03) 379 2297, fax: (03) 366 8535.

NZ Housing Network
c/o Housing Advice Centre, 243 Cuba Street, Palmerston North, tel: (06) 358 4875.

AUSTRALIA

National Council of Social Services (NCOSS)
66 Albion St, Surry Hills, NSW 2010, tel: (02) 211 2599.

NSW Association of Homeless Persons' Services
165B Palmer St, East Sydney, NSW 2010, tel: (02) 331 1969.

Council of Homeless Persons
Level 5, 140 Queen St, Melbourne, VIC 3000, tel: (03) 9606 0766.

BRITAIN

Shelter
The main campaigning organization on housing and homelessness.
Shelter, 88 Old Street, London EC1V 9HU, tel: (0171) 505 2000, fax: (0171) 505 2169.

CHAR
Interested particularly in single homeless people.
CHAR, 5-15 Cromer Street, London WC1H 8LS, tel: (0171) 833 2071.

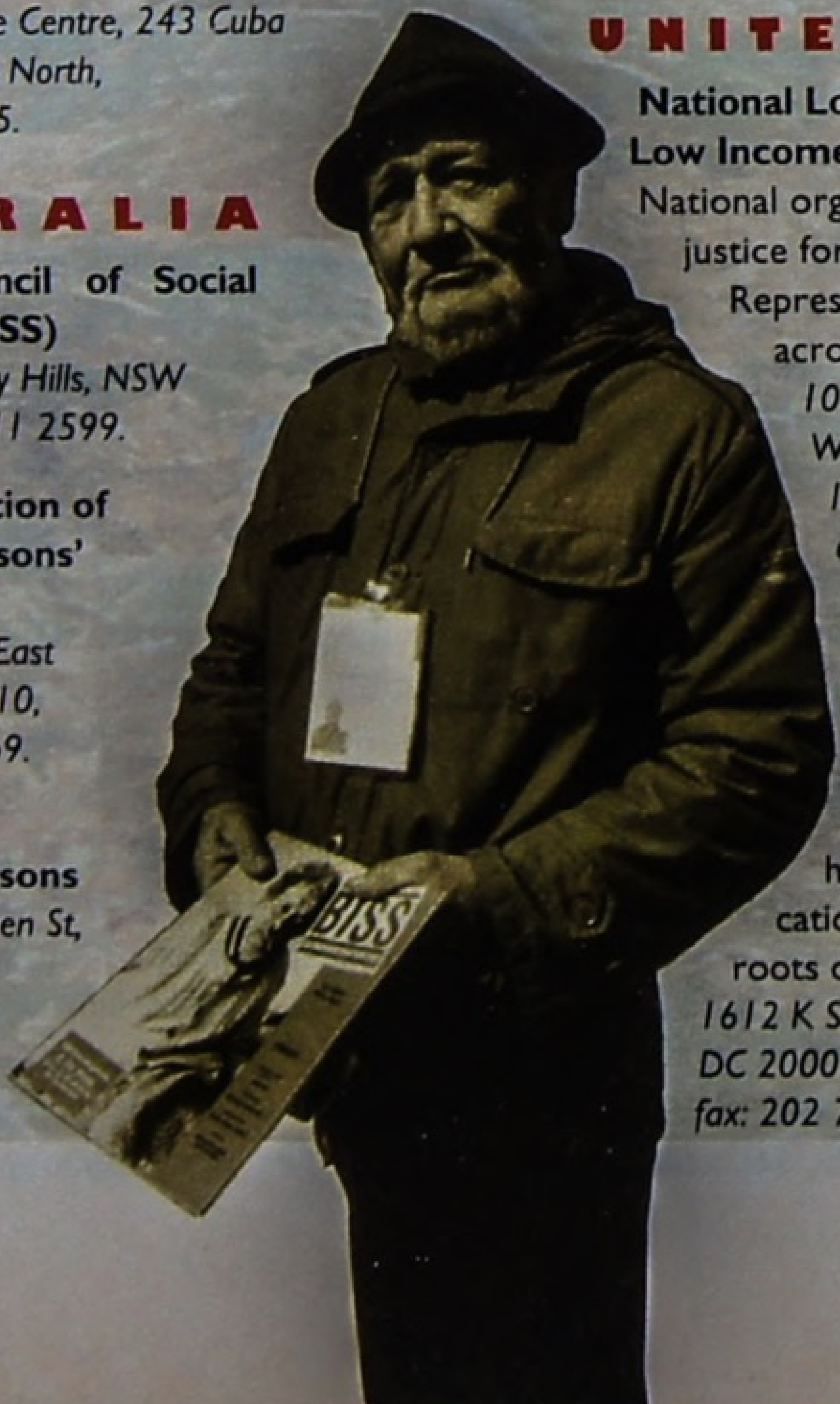
CANADA

National Anti-Poverty Organization
Non-government advocacy group for low-income Canadians focusing on a range of issues including housing.
256 King Edward Avenue, Ste 316, Ottawa, ON K1N 7M1, tel: 613 789-0096, fax: 613 789-0141.

UNITED STATES

National Low Income Housing Coalition/ Low Income Housing Information Service
National organization focusing on housing justice for low income Americans. Represents more than 1200 groups across the country.
1012 14th St NW, Ste 1200, Washington, DC 20005, tel: 202 662-1530, fax: 202 393-1973, e-mail: HN0355.org.com

National Coalition for the Homeless
National network of homeless and ex-homeless, activists and agencies committed to ending homelessness. Focus on public education, policy development and grass-roots organizing.
1612 K St, NW, no 1004, Washington, DC 20006, tel: 202 775-1322, fax: 202 775-1316.



The NI Interview

Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim

Wayne Ellwood talks with a Sudanese activist who has long campaigned for women's rights in her country and is now a strong critic of the country's Muslim fundamentalist regime.

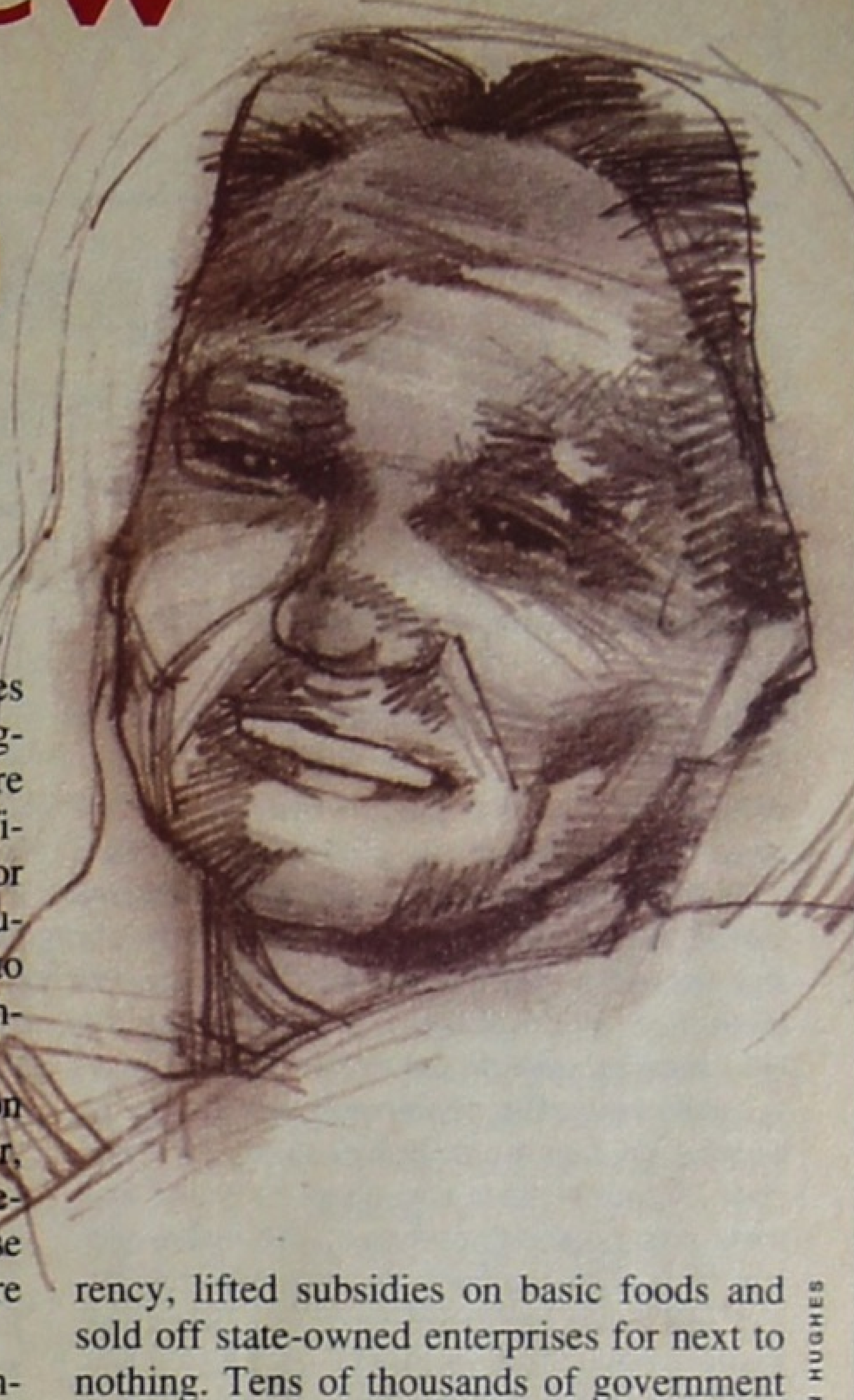


ILLUSTRATION: ALAN HUGHES

FATIMA IBRAHIM is a fighter and it shows. A Muslim, a former Member of Parliament in Sudan and president of the banned Sudanese Women's Union, she has a long history as an outspoken defender of human rights in her country. Now in her early sixties, she crackles with energy as she denounces the Islamic fundamentalists whose regime, she says, has turned her homeland into a war-torn, shattered nation.

'These Islamic extremists are nothing but parasites,' she says, her voice quivering with anger. 'They claim to govern on behalf of God and yet they do nothing but enrich themselves. I can give you names; some of my own relatives who were very poor are now very rich. They send their children to schools in Britain and put their money into banks in Switzerland.'

Since General Omar Hassan al-Bashir came to power by a coup in 1989, backed by the National Islamic Front, Sudan has been on a downhill skid. One of the first things the new government did was to dismiss thousands of government employees and military leaders and replace them with Muslim militants. According to Fatima Ibrahim, fundamentalists from Iraq, Pakistan, Iran, Algeria and Egypt were imported because there were not enough Sudanese extremists to do the job. The country's once numerous middle class was systematically hounded into exile, imprisoned or killed. A quarter of the population (nearly seven million people) is estimated to live outside the country – Fatima Ibrahim among them. There are now more Sudanese doctors practising in London than in Sudan.

> *'We need to replace the negative with something positive and we need to do it quickly'*

This has been a disaster for Africa's largest nation, which has had a solid tradition of strong civic institutions – trade unions, women's groups and student organizations. Sudan was also a country of religious tolerance where Christians and Muslims mixed freely. 'In my family,' says Ms Ibrahim, 'my father was a Muslim Imam, my sister-in-law was a Christian. We used to get together to celebrate both Christian and Muslim holidays.'

Now most of these social groups have been banned. 'Anyone, [she carefully emphasizes each syllable: *an-y-one*] who opposes this regime is under threat,' stresses Ms Ibrahim. 'Armed men kidnap any figure who dares to speak out. People are murdered or run over by a car and the official explanation is that it was a madman or an accident. I myself was watched by security men 24 hours a day; those who came to my house, whether a relative or a neighbour, were arrested.'

Ms Ibrahim fled Sudan in 1989, soon after the fundamentalists took power, though she continues to return, clandestinely, when she can. Her usual route these days is through the non-Arab south, where government control is weakest.

It's also in the south that the fundamentalist forces have done their greatest damage. Here government troops have been fighting a brutal war against two contending separatist groups for the past 13 years – the Sudanese People's Liberation Army and the Southern Sudanese Independence Movement. In an effort to crush the rebels and forcibly convert the largely Black and Christian population to Islam, government troops have run amok. More than a million people have died.

'It is a holy war for this Islamist regime,' Ms Ibrahim says, her voice rising, her wiry body tense with emotion. 'The southern people, since they are Christians, are called pagans. Women are raped routinely because this is seen as a way of putting more Islamic babies into the world. They are flogged for cultural practices like brewing beer; afterwards the money they make from selling it is confiscated.'

Reports from human-rights organizations like Africa Watch and Amnesty International confirm the genocide in southern Sudan. The Bashir regime is completely committed to a unitary Muslim state and appears willing to extirpate all non-Muslims in its quest. This single-minded crusade has led to more than two million internal refugees, most of them southerners who are now camped out in desperate conditions around the capital, Khartoum.

According to Ms Ibrahim, austerity programmes prescribed by the IMF and World Bank have both worsened Sudan's poverty and helped strengthen the power of the fundamentalists. 'They've devalued the currency, lifted subsidies on basic foods and sold off state-owned enterprises for next to nothing. Tens of thousands of government workers have been dismissed. We used to have free education and free health care; now they're both gone. Islamic millionaires run all the old state-owned businesses. In the Qur'an there is a verse which prohibits any Muslim from getting rich at the expense of others. It seems they've conveniently forgotten this aspect of Islam.'

Though she paints a dire picture Fatima Ibrahim is not without hope. 'You see,' she confides, 'the conditions for change are better than ever. The economy has been destroyed, the majority of people are hungry, the regime has virtually no support anywhere and public anger is widespread. Plus all the forces of opposition are now united. This past September the police refused government orders to fire on demonstrators in Khartoum. Instead, the Government had to bring in its own élite-trained militia. I believe that tens of thousands of police and soldiers are now an armed reserve for a popular uprising.'

The Islamic regime is also increasingly isolated diplomatically. All neighbouring countries – Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda – have cut relations. 'But we need Western governments and businesses also to cut relations with the Bashir Government,' urges Ms Ibrahim. 'Any economic support will only help to maintain this dictatorship. Already the bitterness runs deep. We need to replace the negative with something positive and we need to do it quickly.' ■

For more information contact the International Campaign for Peace in Sudan. **Europe** – Box 297, S-751 05, Uppsala, Sweden; **Canada** – c/o Bea Hampton, 1 Nicholas St, Ste 300, Ottawa, ON K1N 7B7; **US** – c/o John Prendergast, 3700 13th St NE, Washington.

Reviews

film

Strange Days
directed by **Kathryn Bigelow**

Nightmare with a core of hope.

OVER THE PAST decade Kathryn Bigelow has established herself as one of the more controversial directors working in the US. In *Blue Steel* she scrutinized the cinema's fascination with gun power. Casting a woman (Jamie Lee Curtis) in the central role of a New York cop, she also offered a critique of the patriarchal institution of the law – cleverly making the links between sanctioned violence and domestic strife when the cop arrests her father for beating up her mom. But despite her film's clear intention she is too often dismissed as a freak phenomenon: a woman who makes violent films. This has been the case with her latest and most extraordinary film **Strange Days**, a cyber-punk thriller which offers a blistering portrayal of the near future. It has already been mistakenly disparaged by some critics as 'brutal ' and 'amoral'. Brutal it might be, but it certainly does not condone what it portrays. Rather it offers a stern warning about the 'red in tooth and claw' nature of Western urban culture. As such, it is perhaps one of the most moral films to come out of Hollywood for some time.

Set in LA on the eve of the millennium, it depicts the city of a civil-war-torn police state. This is not just the stuff of sci-fi fantasy – images of helmeted and armed police patrolling in tanks recall news footage of the 1992 LA riots. In this future too, race relations are fraught. Attempting to make a dubious living in this explosive environment is Lenny Nero (Ralph Fiennes), an ex-cop who now peddles in the latest technology: the state-banned Superconducting Quantum Interference Device or SQUID. This gadget allows one to record and playback individual experiences. One step beyond Virtual Reality, it allows the users to tap into the lives of others. In this respect **Strange Days** foregrounds the vicarious nature of cinema itself – for, after all, isn't it about creating fantasies for audiences to slip into? Bigelow explores both the pleasures and the dreadful dangers of this obsession with images, setting up a moral debate about what should and should not be shown as Lenny stumbles across two exceptionally disturbing clips. In one a friend is raped and murdered; the other shows the ritualistic killing of a young black rap singer who has become a hero of his generation. Offering clarity of vision is his best friend, Mace (Angela Bassett), a resolute young black woman who provides the film's moral centre. While **Strange Days** shapes the future as a nightmare, it also offers hope in humanity as Mace takes a stand that averts a potentially apocalyptic ending.

Politics ☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆ **LF**

books

History of a Genocide 1959-1994
by **Gérard Prunier** *(Hurst & Company, ISBN 1-85065-247-3)*

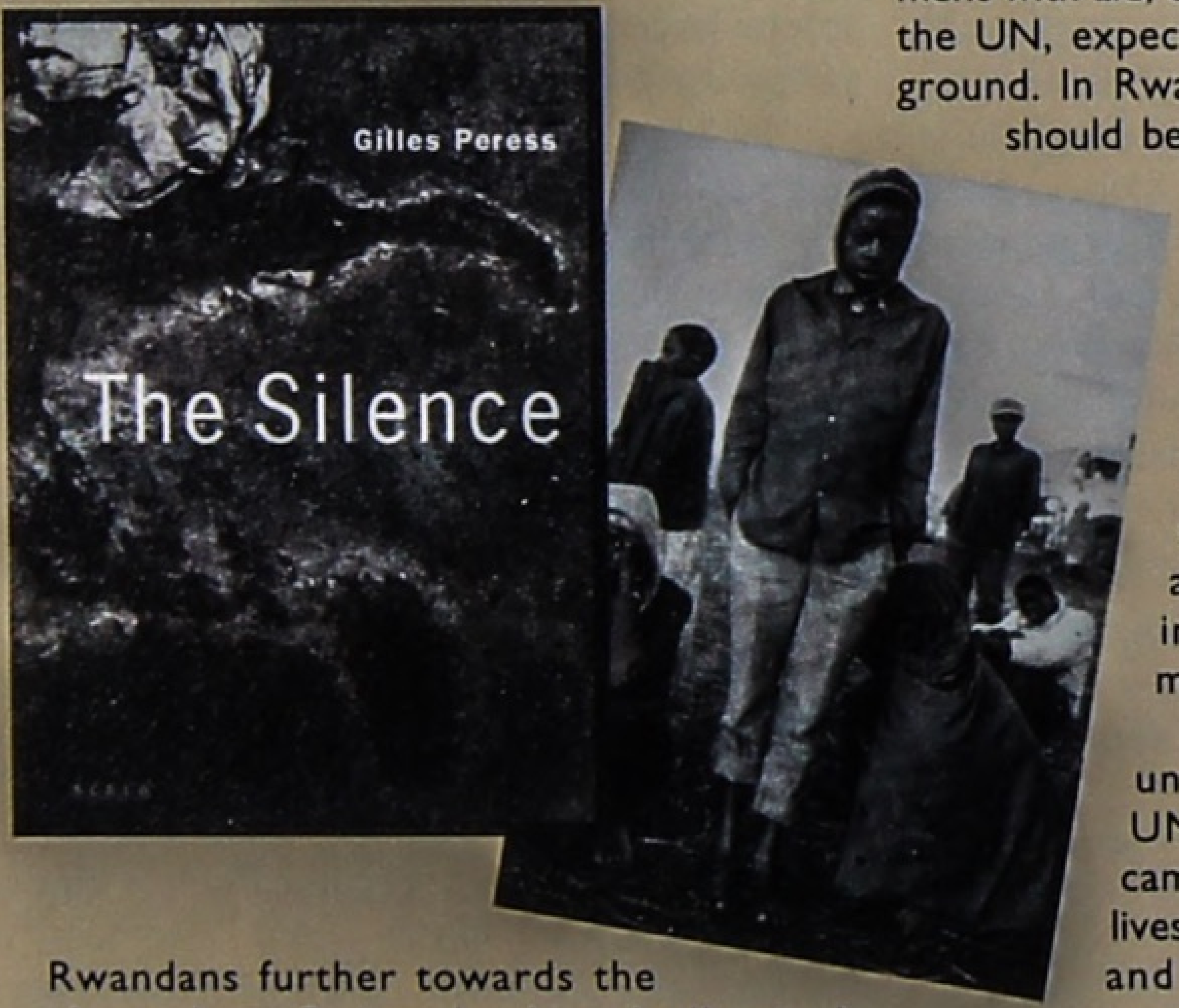
Season of Blood
by **Fergal Keane** *(Viking, ISBN 0-670-86205-3)*

The Angels Have Left Us
by **Hugh McCullum** *(WCC Publications, ISBN 2-8254-1154-X)*

The Silence
by **Gilles Peress** *(Scalo, ISBN 1-881616-38-X)*

IF YOU LOVE books then your imagination will probably have entered the foul-smelling world of the Rwanda genocide already – at Auschwitz. Perhaps as you entered you felt disconcerted, as I did trying to digest as much as I could of these four terrifying books: TV images had somehow contrived to leave me utterly unprepared. Taken together these books deliver a shattering blow to the complacency of modern international politics.

Gérard Prunier proves the value of a history that engages with the present. You discover something of the complexities that lie behind the banality of evil; how the 'conservative revolution' of 1959 switched Hutu for Tutsi oppressors and left Europeans 'with no more to fear'; how the collapse of international coffee prices in 1989 pushed Rwandans further towards the abyss; how Switzerland made 'boring' Rwanda the main recipient of its foreign aid.



Fergal Keane is a courageous British journalist who writes beautifully. He went from South Africa to make a TV documentary about the genocide and this short, moving book tells the story behind it. Yet it is more 'about' how he, and other hardened observers who witnessed the same things, were invaded almost unawares by overwhelming emotion. Though he is too gentle to say so, you can find a trace of the banality of evil in those of his colleagues who argued on his return to London that events in Rwanda were of 'no political consequence' whatever.

The Canadian Hugh McCullum's account is of people who, by virtue of their involvement with aid, or with the churches, or with the UN, expect to occupy the moral high ground. In Rwanda they came as close as should be possible to actively participating in catastrophe.

Which leaves the photographs of Gilles Peress. Perhaps **The Silence** confronts us with the most durable and difficult truth of all. There are no words. The sound of evil, the sound of its aftermath, is silence. The images leave a stark, rigid memorial to humanity in a void.

And the silence persists: under the protection of the UN it lurks in the refugee camps of Zaire or Tanzania; it lives with the people of Rwanda and in 'dispassionate' politics everywhere else.

'Church people,' writes Hugh McCullum, 'in my experience usually want to know where to find hope'. John Watson, the Canadian executive director of CARE, ends McCullum's book by saying that we must 'recognize and deal with the reappearance of an old enemy – fascism'. We are all responsible, and so we are all powerful. Which brings us back to Auschwitz – and so, for once, to the impossibility of rating these four wonderful books for 'entertainment'.

Politics: ☆☆☆☆☆ **DR**

music

Exil

by **Giya Kancheli** *(ECM New Series 1535 447 808 CD)*

IT IS OFTEN said, somewhat tritely, that exile is a condition that bears fruit in the arts department. In the case of Giya Kancheli you could argue that exile has been his musical liberation. A Georgian composer who left the then USSR some years ago for life in Western Europe, his work fits loosely into the dismissively-termed 'holy minimalist' genre of Gorécki, John Taverner and Arvo Pärt. Within a rigorous classical structure, Kancheli hints at folk motifs, orthodox liturgical music and an experimentalism that simultaneously reflects a Soviet training as well as a search for something beyond. In exile he was able to blend religious themes with both tonality and atonality.

Exil is a song-cycle which explores an internal sense of separation. Sung by soprano Maacha Deubner and scored for flute with a small string ensemble, the piece addresses the empty spaces which we all, at some time or another, visit. Its sound vistas are sombre, eerie spaces, both contemplative and lonely – suggesting that the separation is perhaps that of mind and spirit. Kancheli's choice of texts, *Psalm 23*, followed by settings for three poems by Paul Celan and one by Hans Sahl, all stress the solitary condition of the individual. There is no sense of community – the notes are often sparse, with Deubner enunciating pauses as much as the words. **Exil** is bleak – but there is also a promise of engagement. At intervals themes played on the lower registers of the cello swell up to suggest that hope exists, and that within the space there is the very real possibility of transcendence.

Politics ☆☆

Entertainment ☆☆☆☆ **LG**

STAR RATING	
Excellent	☆☆☆☆☆
Very good	☆☆☆☆
Good	☆☆☆
Fair	☆☆
Poor	☆

Reviews by **Louise Gray, Lizzie Francke** and **David Ransom**
Reviews editor: **Vanessa Baird**

THE CLASSIC

Emitai

...being the first major dramatic film of the liberated sub-Saharan cinema.

'FILM SHOULD BE A SCHOOL OF HISTORY,' says Ousmane Sembene of Senegal, widely considered the father of African cinema. 'We have to have the courage to say that in the colonial period we were sometimes colonized with the help of our own leaders... We mustn't be ashamed of our faults and our errors.'

Sembene made these statements concrete with the 1971 premiere of **Emitai**, his visually rich and complex drama set in the Diola society of rural Senegal. Perhaps the ideas struck too close to home. The film was immediately banned in Senegal, indeed throughout Africa.

Emitai tells the story of key incidents that took place in French colonial Senegal during the Second World War. The film centres on attempts by the colonial administration to impose a new rice tax in a Diola village and the resistance that followed. The community becomes divided over what strategy to take. The traditional elders are backed into a corner and humiliated, while the village women adopt new tactics and take strong action. In a series of startling and vivid scenes, visions of the gods appear to the elders, while in another part of the village women rapidly organize and hide the substantial rice crop.

The Diola people Sembene focuses on in this film are a small ethnic minority who possess a distinct language, culture and history, and refer to their part of the world as 'the Sacred Forest'. Before European colonization the Diola organized themselves as a stateless society, 'roughly speaking as a democracy,' says Sembene. The traditional elders functioned as political spokespeople, especially in times of crisis. Women played a central role, with responsibility for agricultural production. The Diola religion dictates that the rice crop is sacred. Although it can be eaten, it is the property of the gods – and this forms the thematic core and central paradox of **Emitai**. The rice cannot be given up because it belongs to the gods. But if it is not given up the society will be destroyed by the French.

Based on his own screenplay, **Emitai** was Sembene's third drama and the film that launched his world reputation. But reaching an international audience was not his aim. Rather he wanted to communicate directly with the Diola society. He is proud that the villagers 'were happy to hear that there was a beautiful language for them'. The film is not about the elders, or the women, the act of resistance, the cruelty of the French or the leading characters. It is all these at once, touching on economics, social structure, religion and culture. The pace may be slow for those of us raised on Hollywood action, but there is a richness of gesture and a symbolic language that holds the attention of any audience. Western viewers will be unable to distinguish fully between the natural speech of the villagers and the stylistic embellishments of the actors, yet this lively fluctuation between the natural speech and artistic play must surely be a source of richness for Diola audiences.

Senegal today is a major cultural and economic power in West Africa. After gaining independence in 1960 it immediately embarked on a widely-copied form of African state socialism. The results have been mixed. Strong nationalized sectors of the economy are now offset by a dangerous reliance on International Monetary Fund policies and on peanuts as an export crop. Human-rights abuses have been widespread, and key artists and intellectuals, such as Sembene, have faced a rocky road.

Born in Senegal in 1923, Sembene served in the French army during the Second World War, then moved to France where he became a dockworker – and immediately launched a prolific writing career. His reputation was quickly established, especially with the novel *God's Bits of Wood* (1955), based on Senegal's great railway strike of the 1940s. Then in 1960, in a dramatic shift of gears, Sembene moved to the Soviet Union to study film-making. Four years later, armed with rock-solid skills and a clear political drive, he was back in Senegal deeply involved in film production, in order, he says, to reach a wider, national audience than he could through literature. Senegal has one of the poorest literacy rates in Africa – 50 per cent for men, only 25 per cent for women.

African cinema has often looked to Senegal to play a leading role. This is partly because unlike the British or the Portuguese, the French provided funding for indigenous film-making in their former colonies in West Africa.

Emitai marked out different terrain and set tough new standards for African cinema, however. It was produced almost entirely with African money and made few concessions to non-African audiences. It presented a daring new artistic discussion of political issues concerning Africa's past and future. The critique of colonialism was vigorous without simplifying the tensions in African society. And finally, **Emitai** was unique at the time in its strong portrayal of African women. ■

Peter Steven

Emitai directed by **Ousmane Sembene** was released in 1971 and is distributed by Metro Pictures.

Curiosities

QUESTIONS THAT HAVE ALWAYS INTRIGUED YOU ABOUT THE WORLD WILL APPEAR IN THIS, YOUR SECTION, AND BE ANSWERED BY OTHER READERS. PLEASE ADDRESS YOUR ANSWERS AND QUESTIONS TO 'CURIOSITIES'.

Does anyone know what happened to the proposal by an African scientist to provide refugee camps in Zaire with efficient small ovens that could be mass produced from scrap metal in a nearby town and that would reduce the burning of wood by a huge percentage?

● I have not heard of such ovens specifically in relation to refugee camps in Zaire but work is being carried out in Kenya by Doctor Daniel Kammen of Princeton University and Monique Nditu of the African Academy of Sciences into the use and supply of similar ovens. Their work is based on the thesis that people in Majority World countries rely on wood for over 50 per cent of their energy needs, and their forests are coming down as their populations rise. Solar power, wind power and other renewable energy sources seem like the obvious solution to the problem, but they have rarely been put to the test. Three years of successful fieldwork in Kenya has examined whether solar ovens and windmills can both fulfil the Kenyans' energy needs and fit in with their society. A major goal of this project is to develop a training centre for research into renewable energy and the environment that will serve researchers and community groups from all over Africa. Workshops are held in which Kenyans adapt and construct solar ovens and, in follow-up studies, chart the impact of the ovens on household economies in local villages. These highly successful workshops have spread to other Majority World countries.

Volunteers and funding for the project comes from Earthwatch.

Diane Collins
Bracknell, England

MARK EDWARDS

More sun than wood in Africa.

● I note that *Scientific American* magazine has an article entitled 'Cookstoves for the Developing World' in the July 1995 issue (pp 72-75). Perhaps the scientist the questioner seeks is within that article?

Lance Read
Vancouver, Canada

Given that the profit from slave labour in today's terms is a staggering $187 billion, are there any legal precedents for this money to be repaid in some way as a legacy to the living descendants of such slaves?

● Many societies from before – and including – the Romans have been involved in the slave trade. Therefore, allowing for inflation, the sum of $187 billion seems a bit low. I would suggest the effort put into worrying about slaves in history should be redirected towards the problem of slavery in today's world.

Richard Rouse
Bristol, England

Anti-Slavery International combats present-day slavery. Its address is: Stableyard, Broomgrove Road, London SW 9 9TL Tel: 0171 924 9555. Fax: 0171 738 4110

AWAITING YOUR ANSWERS

Is it 'proven' that long-lived creatures carry the same, unaltered DNA throughout their lives – or is this just an assumption?

Mary Morgans
Southport, England

How would the introduction of a single European currency affect countries of the South?

Isabel Milner
London, England

How much energy is needed to manufacture an average-sized car?

Leigh Cavanagh
Staines, England

How are features added on to a globe? I can think of no convincing way that complex images could be printed directly onto a sphere without distortion or numerous joins.

Paul Fitzgerald
Manchester, England

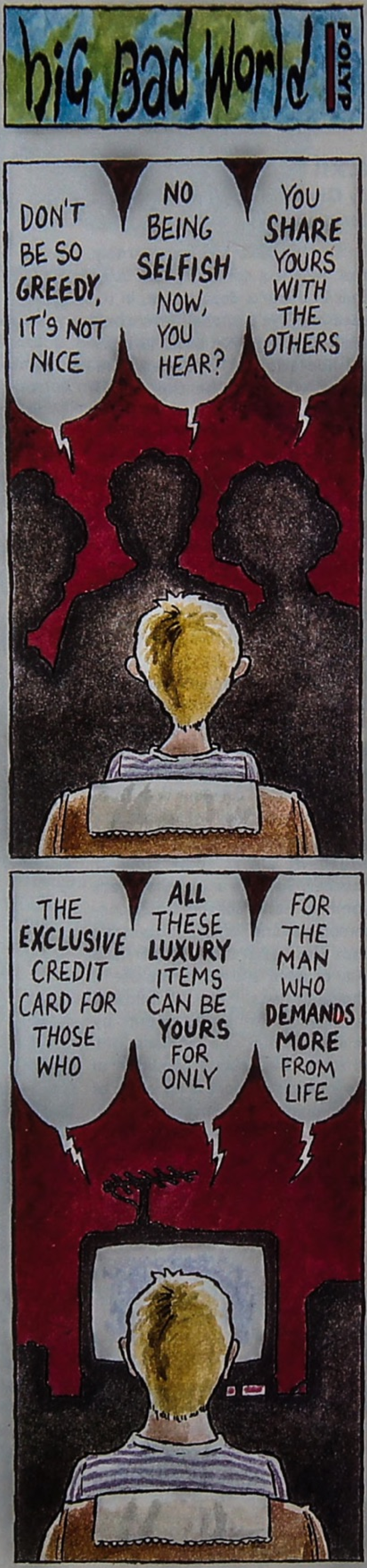
Is there an organization that collects medical goods (not drugs) past their expiry date?

Felicity Roberts
Kidderminster, England

At work we use the term 'Spanish custom' when highlighting the use of a procedure that has not been documented in one of our many rule books. Where has the term come from?

Louise Funnell
Bristol, England

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR ANSWERS PLEASE SEND THEM TO **CURIOSITIES, NEW INTERNATIONALIST, 55 RECTORY ROAD, OXFORD OX4 1BW, UK,** OR TO YOUR LOCAL NI OFFICE (SEE INSIDE FRONT COVER FOR ADDRESSES).
THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THIS SECTION ARE NOT NECESSARILY THOSE OF THE **NI.**


big Bad World
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FOR THE MAN WHO DEMANDS MORE FROM LIFE

ENDPIECE

Thinking of you, Amelia

A fragment of wood on death row in Georgia turns **Brandon Astor Jones** to writing for a three-year-old friend in Liverpool.

> *'The food here is so tasteless you could eat a meal ... [then] belch, and it wouldn't remind you of anything.'*
>
> **Redd Foxx***

SENSORY DEPRIVATION can cause unusual, even strange responses. Prisoners are among the most deprived in all so-called 'civilized societies'. As a consequence, in an effort to maintain sanity, prisoners create and develop a myriad of coping techniques.

One of the ways I cope is constantly to be on the look-out for a shred of 'good' in even the worst of daily prison experiences – a task, I should add, that is not for the faint of heart. For example, I love wood; and unless you like hanging out with a mop or a broom there is little wood to be found in prison.

So I began to compensate for the lack of access to wood by going to the visiting room as often as possible. You see, in the visiting room there are steel posts bolted to the floor, but on top of them there are two-inch-thick circles of wood that serve as stools. Touching that wood is good for my soul. Wood has always fascinated me.

As I do not get very many visits, I had to develop lots of other wood-strategies. I soon gathered up a bunch of wooden pencils. When you hold several wooden pencils in your hand you have, albeit in a somewhat fractured way, a single piece of whatever you want to imagine it to be.

Because I write a lot it was not long before I had worn all of those pencils down to nubs. When I tried to purchase more of them from the prison store, for reasons not entirely clear to me, I learned that wooden pencils are no longer sold. It seems that plastic pencils are all they sell nowadays.

Some time ago a cracked broom was sent into the cell block. When I accidentally dropped the broom, while sweeping out cell 51, a small piece broke away. I turned the broom in and went back to the cell. I picked up the small piece of wood, closed it tightly in my fist and sat down on the bunk. I saw myself in the mirror of my mind's eye and for a moment I felt like a crying infant whose parent had just shoved a pacifier into its mouth. That tiny piece of wood had brought a quiet calm over the storm that was raging within my wood-deprived soul. Unfortunately that calm did not last. For in less than a week, during a routine cell-search, a corrections officer found and confiscated my tiny wooden treasure.

For three years after that I went without wood. Then one day they served spaghetti, with the usual prison meat sauce poured over it. Prison food is, to speak charitably of it, bland at best. It takes a bit more courage than I have at my disposal to eat a serving of prison spaghetti sauce.

Undaunted in my never-ending quest for something good – even if it looks so bad I dare not eat it – I always stir around in whatever is served. You never can tell what you might find. It is not uncommon to discover a toe nail, roaches, rocks or any kind of hair you can imagine. In that particular batch of meat sauce I found a bay leaf, but surprisingly nothing more.

I picked it out, took it to the cell, washed it off and placed it between two layers of wax paper. I then put it amid the pages of my heaviest book. That was over six months ago. Yeah, yeah, yeah... I know, just because it is all dry, flat and hard that does not make it a fine ebony board, but for me it does share a familial kinship (in a leafy fashion) with the tree of life that is rooted deeply in my soul.

I thought I should share it with you. At three years old, all of this is a little hard for you to understand right now, but one day when your mother shows you this essay, and that old bay leaf, you'll know I was thinking of you, Amelia. ■

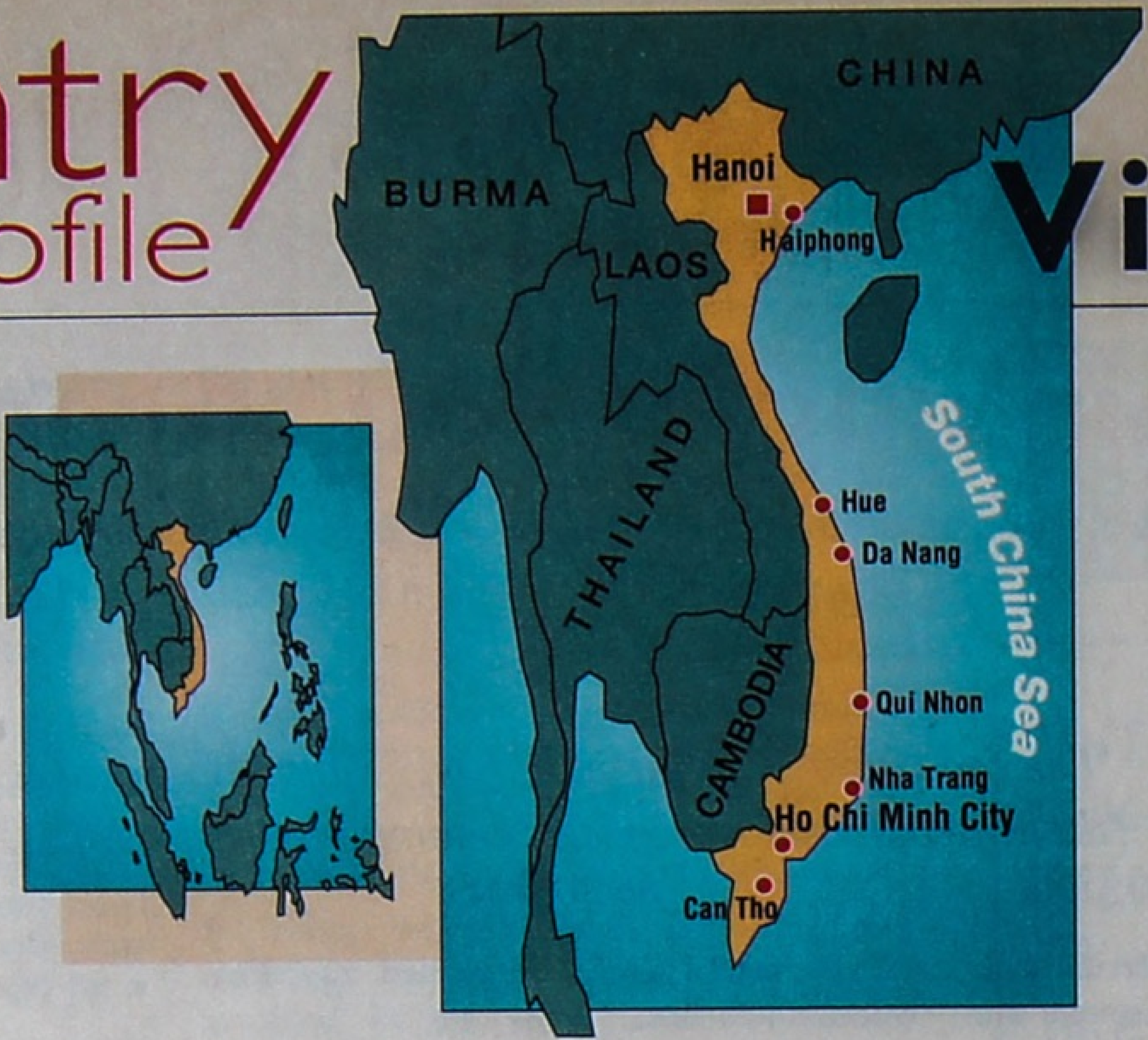
COURTESY OF GLENYS ALDERTON

Brandon Astor Jones has been on death row for many years. He can be written to as G2-51, EF-122216, GDCC, POB 3877, Jackson, Georgia 30233, USA. No executions are expected in Georgia until after the closing ceremony of the Olympic Games in Atlanta; the Olympic village is just 70 kilometres from death row.

**Redd Foxx was, in my humble opinion, the premier risqué African-American comedian. Were I to describe Mr Foxx in comparison to another I would call him the Will Rogers of color, with a dirty yet pleasant mouth.*

Country profile

Vietnam



HANOI has an elegance that belies its association in the mind with war: tree-lined boulevards, an Old Quarter, the 'Lake of the Restored Sword'. But one of Asia's finest architectural jewels may not long survive the century.

Even five years ago you could wander around Hanoi on foot or on your bike and see a certain charm in the absence of road rules. Now traffic has become a serious problem: Vietnam has 330,000 cars and over four million motorbikes, respectively double and four times the numbers there were in 1990. Small hotels and office buildings are springing up all over the city, flouting planning restrictions or evading them through bribery – commercial rents in Hanoi are now as high as in Paris and 70-per-cent higher than in Sydney. The free market has arrived with a vengeance in what was once the very symbol of communism.

Vietnam's struggle for independence from French colonialism was spearheaded by Ho Chi Minh's Communist Party. French troops were routed at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 but the country was divided in two as the US ruled out the prospect of elections the Communists would certainly have won. By 1965 the US was pouring troops into South Vietnam and bombing the North. The US-Vietnam War became an international focal point – but the price for Washington's anti-communist crusade was paid mainly by ordinary civilians, 25,000 of whom died for each year of the War.

Defeated and bruised, the US withdrew in 1973; North Vietnamese forces entered Saigon two years later, reuniting the country under the Communist flag. Hanoi hoped for Western aid in reconstruction but found itself isolated, especially after it invaded neighbouring Cambodia in 1979, deposing the genocidal Khmer Rouge. Western nations imposed a trade-and-aid embargo which was not lifted until 1994; the US finally normalized relations in 1995.

By then Vietnam was profoundly changed. In 1986 the Communist Party embarked on a course of *doi moi*, or 'renovation' – economic reforms which started to open the country up to market forces and foreign investment. Once-banned street traders sprang into vigorous life and the Government passed some of the most liberal foreign-investment laws in Asia. Lately another catch-phrase has been on everyone's lips – *tut hau*, or 'catch up' with the Asian Tigers on the fast track to economic growth.

The first fruits are there – rice production has doubled in six years to make Vietnam the world's third-largest rice exporter while the economy has expanded at nine per cent for the last two years. 'Vietnam has the last intelligent, cost-effective labour in Asia,' says one keen Taiwanese investor. But businesspeople still complain of being stymied by 'bureaucratic red tape'.

Certainly corruption is growing and official wheels turn slowly. But in part the suspicion of entrepreneurs reflects the Government's wariness of an uncontrolled free market – Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet's injunction to 'learn, not copy' economic laws and practice in the region is only sensible. Besides, as the market takes hold, the gap between rich and poor is yawning wider all the time.

The confusion is even reflected in the constitution, which defines Vietnam as a 'socialist-oriented multi-sectoral economy driven by the state-regulated market mechanism'. Wow.

The Government's only certainty is that Vietnam must remain a one-party state. It is much less repressive than it used to be and probably hopes to follow the South Korean path from harsh to gentle authoritarianism. But as Vietnam takes its rightful place in the world community the Government's resistance to political reform is going to be more and more difficult to sustain. ■

Chris Brazier

AT A GLANCE

CHRIS BRAZIER

Leader Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet

Economy GNP per capita $170, the lowest in Asia and the seventh-lowest in the world.
Monetary unit: Dong
Main exports: rice, crude oil, coal and zinc
Main imports: oil products, fertilizers and steel
Foreign investment is growing rapidly – $3.7 billion in 1994, $5.4 billion in the first nine months of 1995. Hotels and manufacturing are the most popular sectors and Taiwan and Hong Kong provide the main investment capital. US companies have been slow to move – of the major players only Pepsi, Coca Cola and Mobil have arrived.

People 72.9 million. Population growth rate of 2.2%.

Health Infant mortality of 35 per 1,000 live births (Canada 6 per 1,000). Given Vietnam's poverty this is a remarkably good record, reflecting the former priority on local clinics. But much medical treatment now has to be paid for and even the World Bank has criticized the Government's under-investment.

Culture Most people are Kinh/Vietnamese but there is a significant Chinese minority as well as 60 minority ethnic groups, mainly concentrated in the hills of the north and west.
Religion: Mainly Buddhist or traditional religions but there are two million Catholics. Religion was discouraged by the Communist Government but there is now much greater freedom of worship.

Sources: *Far Eastern Economic Review; State of the World's Children 1996.*

Previously profiled April 1984

NI star rating

EXCELLENT	★★★★★
GOOD	★★★★
FAIR	★★★
POOR	★★
APPALLING	★

STAR RATINGS

INCOME DISTRIBUTION ★★★
Once a society that prided itself on equality, income disparities are widening daily.
1984 ★★★

LITERACY ★★★★
91%. Still high despite the declining funding of education. The Vietnamese are passionate to learn.
1984 ★★★★★

SELF-RELIANCE ★★★★
Has been forced into self-reliance by the collapse of Soviet support and by Western disapproval.
1984 ★★

FREEDOM ★★★
The social atmosphere is less repressive but the Communist Party's authority can still not be challenged.
1984 ★★

POSITION OF WOMEN ★★★
Traditional roles and attitudes persist despite women's contribution during the War.
1984 ★★★

LIFE EXPECTANCY ★★★★
65 years. Compares with a rich-world average of 76.
1984 ★★★★

POLITICS

NI ASSESSMENT ★★★
The Communist Party is trying to avoid the painful lurch to the free market witnessed in the former Soviet bloc. But it is in danger of landing Vietnam's people with the worst of both worlds – an authoritarian one-party state and a rampant free market which threatens the real achievements in health and education.

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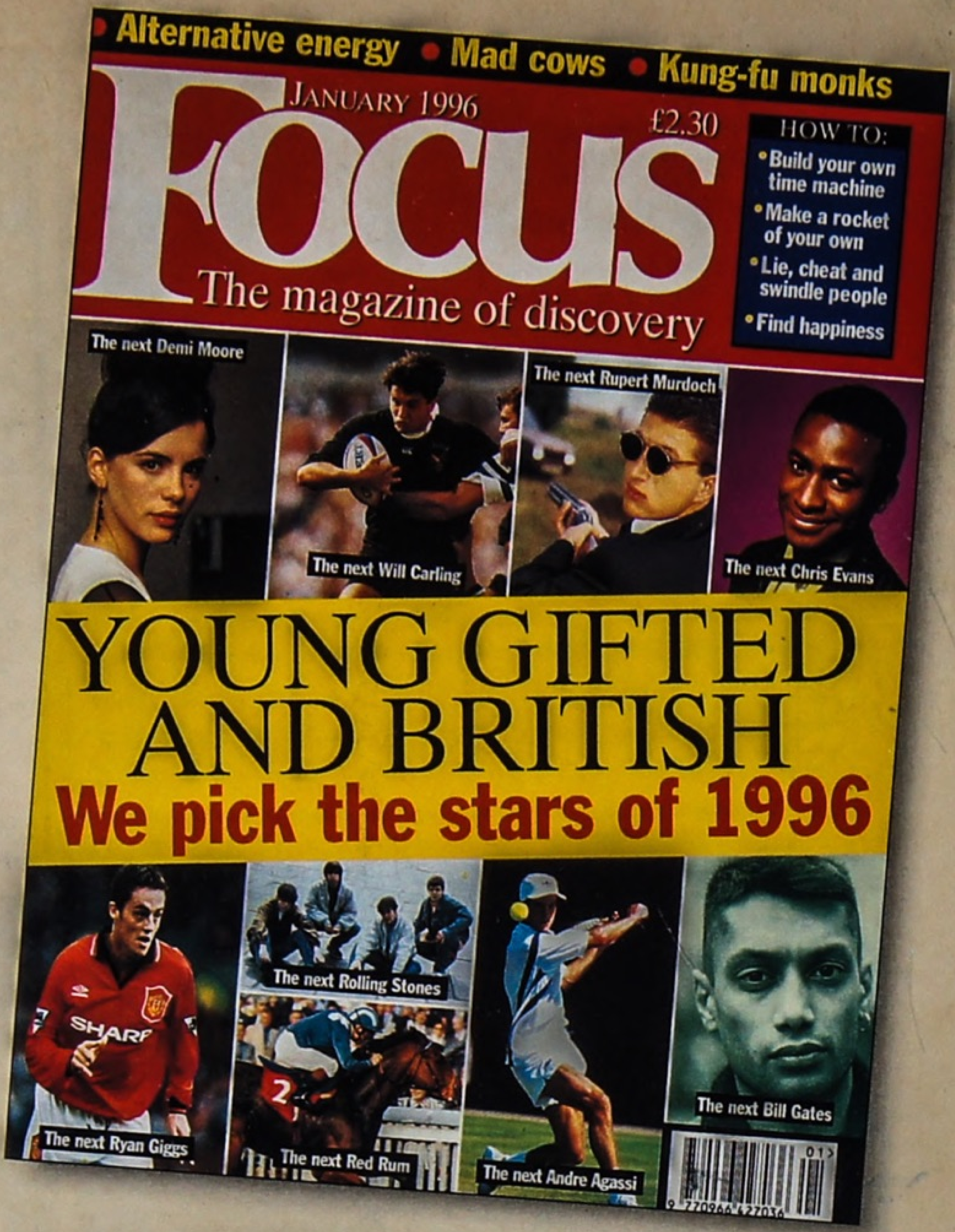
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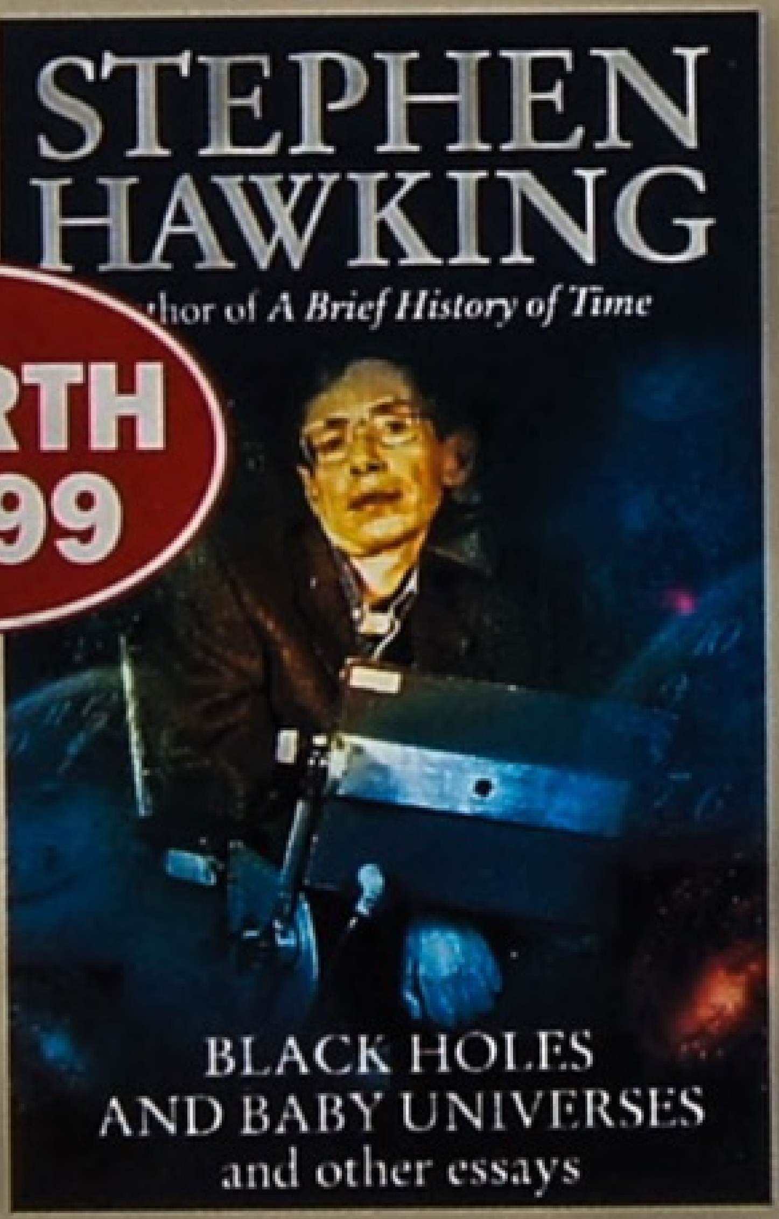
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